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TALES OF TERROR AND THE MACABRE

THE HAUNT OF HORROR

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IN THIS ISSUE
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THE HAUNT OF HORROR

AUGUST 1973

**DEVIL
NIGHT****Dennis
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**THE HAUNT OF
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COVER BY KELLY FREAS,
 ILLUSTRATING "DEVIL NIGHT"

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CONDITIONAL TERROR

AN ODD FACT about people: sometimes horrors don't seem quite as horrible when they're happening to someone else.

This is a fact we live with and hardly ever consider. It's a way of life. If we read about a knifing in the newspaper, or see the body carted away on TV, we cluck and shake our heads in a kind of empty sympathy. We say, "Isn't it terrible," "The poor girl," "Whatever is

the world coming to," and having performed the ritual, we promptly forget the matter and return to our private affairs. It's the way we cope with modern horror.

And it's the way that horror continues.

You see, we have a form of conditional terror. For an event to affect us, it has to fulfill certain conditions: a) has it happened to someone I know; b) did it happen near my home; c) is it something new; d) does it threaten me—now? This

last condition is obviously the most important. If we feel secure in our safety, we can shrug the horror off. We can forget that someone **else** died from an overdose of drugs; that someone **else** was raped on a subway platform; that someone **else** was found face-up in the wastes of an industrial cesspool.

We can put distance between ourselves and the horror. By doing this, we avoid the fact that we too are vulnerable. And by avoiding that fact . . . we make ourselves more vulnerable, in the end.

CONDITIONAL TERROR. The malady of Twentieth Century Man in his eighth decade. When people say that pollution is going to destroy us, or war, or overpopulation, or mass-insanity, they're wrong; we're going to die because we're not afraid. It takes us too long to become frightened. We don't respond quickly or enough. Too many of us are dead to the horrors around us; too many have only conditional terror.

Perhaps that's why the current return to an appreciation of the literature of the weird is so healthy. It shows that the capacity to empathize is not completely lost. For all their failings, novels such as **The Exorcist**, **The Other**, and **The Stepford Wives** do bring us closer to an understanding of the pain and suffering of people in fear. By becoming involved with the characters, we become involved in their terror as well. Perhaps it readies us just a little to accept the real-life terrors of the people around us.

We hope so. It's a comforting thought.

And lord knows, there aren't very many of those.

THIS SECOND ISSUE of the **HAUNT OF HORROR** is slightly different from our first, in a variety of ways. Primarily, the type on our fictional pieces is smaller and "heavier" than the typeface we used for our first issue; by using this new face, we were able

to include two more stories than we'd originally intended, one of them the sure-to-be-controversial special feature by Harlan Ellison.

The second difference is a much more open approach to illustration. We feel that one of the less successful features of our first issue was the general art direction, and we've taken steps to improve that department, with results that should be obvious throughout the magazine. Our thanks for help in this area go to Kelly Freas, Walt Simonson, John Buscema, Frank Brunner, Dan Green, Gene Colan and Billy Graham, for their illustrations and suggestions. Special thanks are due Kelly Freas for providing us with this issue's cover under somewhat unusual circumstances.

The third change is editorial, and is certainly the most dramatic. After helping with the organization and editing of our first issue, George Alec Effinger has left as our Associate Editor, though he will be present, assisting editorially on a less demanding level; a busy novelist, working on a book for Harper and Row, Effinger found he couldn't devote as much time to the magazine as he'd first hoped. Replacing Piglet (as he's known to friends and enemies alike) will be Len Wein, whose strong background in art and design will contribute to the look of the magazine in general.

Starting with our next issue, **THE HAUNT OF HORROR** will go to all-original material. Also starting next issue, we'll be running a regular letter column, as well as continuing our featured **BOO KREVIEW** section, which was dropped this issue for lack of space. Let us know what you think of **THOH**; what direction you believe the magazine should take, what sort of stories you'd like to see—and what your **opinion** is of the stories you've already seen. Only the most interesting letters will see print. So be interesting. And write soon.

We like to know you're out there. □

The Eisens had the devil in them ...
and it was hell on earth the night they
let the devil out!

DEVIL NIGHT

DENNIS O'NEIL



Illustrated by John Buscema

BEFORE THE WAR, they used to say the Eisel family had a devil, and considering all that happened, it must have been true. At least, Abner Eisel was surely possessed; there's no other explanation for what happened the night of the hayride. Oh, after you've heard my story, you'll say *hypnosis*, or *suggestion*, or *hysteria*, or if you're of an *avant-garde* persuasion, you'll call it *extrasensory perception* or—this is my favorite—*sexual repression*. But you weren't present, and I was, and I insist: *devil*.

To disagree with me intelligently, you should know something of Abner and his family, and the uses of liquor. I'll tell you: the Eisels were dirt farmers who worked a rocky hundred acres about five miles south of Feeley—hard, taciturn folk, as unrelenting as the clay they fought with their plows. They *had* to be drunk and they were, always. Somewhere beneath the sunburned, grime-riven skin, the Eisels were human, and nothing human can trudge behind mules in the fierce southern sun every day and for reward eat meals of grits and field corn and sand, and be sober. If you were a Missouri dirt farmer in 1916, you could be holier than John the Baptist, crazy, or drunk; those, and those alone, were the choices you had. Old Ezra Eisel chose drunkenness. His sons did, too. And with it came cussedness. Any lad of fighting age—our gladiators were generally between 17 and 30—was well advised to vacate the area around the Eisels if it was earlier than noon unless he had a hankering for breaks and bruises. Mornings, the Eisels were just half-juiced, and mean as copperheads. Afternoons, with a full load on, they mellowed considerably; they might even acknowledge a greeting with a quick,

lizard-like motion of their heads.

Abner was the different one, a finer product than his father and brothers, Alfred and Jabez. Don't mistake me: Ab was nobody's model youth, but he *was* cherry, friendly. When the Eisels drove their buckboard to town for such supplies as they couldn't wrest from the land, Alfred, Jabez and the old man wore faces like rocks. Abner, by contrast, joked, flattered, laughed in a highpitched voice that reminded me of a squeaky wagon axel. Even as a little boy, he prattled charmingly to the customers in the general store while his father and brothers loaded the buckboard in stony silence. They would wait for him, sitting upright behind the animals sucking draughts of corn from Mason jars like three thirsty stumps.

As he grew older, Abner became still friendlier. From the time of his fifteenth birthday, Abner did the shopping alone. Early Saturday morning, he'd guide the mules to the store, leave his order with the clerk, and cross Central Street to Knopp's tavern. He didn't need a drink; he'd already breakfasted from a Mason jar. But he'd buy himself a nickle beer and nurse it for an hour, gabbing with whoever was around, then go back to the store, put his purchases onto the wagonbed, and return for another hour, another nickel beer. We agreed that Abner was the best of a generally bad lot, as likeable as his parent and brothers weren't.

MAYBE HERE I'd better describe him briefly, because part of the change which occurred when his devil poked out was physical. As a young man, Abner was middling handsome: tall, clear-eyed, with thick red hair, sturdy limbs, a sprinkling of freckles across his broad, ruddy face. He had the beginnings of a belly—big

guts were an Eisel trait—and a pleasantly squeaky voice. That was Abner Eisel, 1916: handsome, pleasant, a convivial drinker.

So it didn't surprise us when he moved to Feeley and took a job at Slinkard's Livery Stable, nor when he began courting the Slinkard's oldest girl, Elizabeth. Abner was plainly ambitious; he wanted the stable, we guessed, bad enough to woo poor Lizzy, surely the ugliest, most heavily moustached woman in the county. Well, despite his looks and disposition, Abner was no prize, not with that family of his. An Eisel couldn't hope to do better than a Slinkard, and since Ben Slinkard was no stranger to the bottle, Abner's mason jars were no obstacle. Abner and Liz were, all considered, a decent match.

On the first day of Spring, 1916, their engagement was announced at Sunday Mass, and a small crowd gathered outside St. Pascal's to congratulate them.

"I'm finally getting me a son," Ben said, right arm around Abner's shoulders, left circling Liz's waist. "Got five girls, I'm finally getting me a boy."

"You'll be getting some grandchildren before long," Abner said, winking at Liz. His betrothed bowed her head, blushing through her moustache.

The same day, Ben gave a party. Everyone came, except the town teatotalers, and stood on the Slinkard's front lawn, sipping Ben's brew, pitching horseshoes, discussing crops and the war in Europe. Ben's wife, Maddy, and his second eldest daughter, Weezy, played hostesses, attending to everyone's needs—everyone, that is, except the Eisels, who stood under a birch tree, not drinking, sullenly refusing Ben's

offers of bought whiskey—an insult?—and ignoring attempts to draw them into the conversation. I don't recall seeing them even congratulate the happy couple. No, they kept their own company, testaments to pure orneriness, less drunk than usual. We youngsters were scared of them, with good reason.

At dusk, the trouble happened, the foreshadowing of the hayride. The devil showed himself. We heard him clearly, yelling in Jabez Eisel's voice, saying, "Now what the hell you figure you're doing, nigger?"

We looked. Jabez, Alfred and Ezra were at the edge of the lawn, surrounding little Hosiah Reilly, Ben Slinkard's black stable boy.

"You know there's a law says niggers to to be off the streets by dark?" Alfred asked. "You know that, nigger?"

It was very quiet suddenly. We could hear Hosiah's whispered, "Yes, sir."

Jabez grabbed a fistful of Hosiah's hair and forced the black's gaze skyward. "You see the sky? Is that sky daytime to you?"

"No, sir, Mr. Eisel. It ain't daytime."

"Then how come you standing here?" Jabez demanded, yanking Hosiah's head back further.

"I'm sorry. I was just on my way to—"

"We ain't interested in excuses, nigger," Alfred shouted into Hosiah's face.

Ben Slinkard shambled unsteadily to the Eisels and the black and said, "Hosiah, you skeddaddle on home."

"He's staying," Jabez said righteously. "He ain't going nowhere till he learns respect for white man's law."

"Probably he didn't mean no harm," Ben said softly.

Old Ezra stepped close to Ben and said, "Mr. Slinkard, I'm ashamed of you."

Ezra spun, and brought a hard brown fist sweeping down onto Hosiah's mouth. A bone cracked, muffled, yet sickeningly loud, and Hosiah sank to his knees as though he were melting. He knelt on the grass, both hands cupping his broken jaw; in the twilight, the blood trickling between his fingers was darker than his skin. He was whimpering. The rest of us were impassive, watchful and numb, until someone started forward, maybe me. Ezra Eisel and his eldest sons stirred—an almost imperceptible shifting of weight, but still a defiance, a challenge.

"Ain't none of you plans to *help* this nigger?" Ezra demanded.

Fists hanging from loose, akimbo forearms, the Eisels regarded us, glaring like sunlight on ice. The old man kicked Hosiah lightly, the way he'd kick a caterpillar off a porch railing.

"Get out of my sight, nigger," Ezra said.

One of us spoke, timidly. "Ain't no call to—"

"You talking to me?" Ezra asked. "Somebody say something to me?"

Nobody admitted it. Instead, we turned away and carefully examined our drinks.

"Move, nigger," Alfred screamed.

Hosiah's moans grew fainter, stopped, and we knew he was gone.

THE PARTY WAS OVER. We sauntered to Ben and the engaged pair, murmured congratulations, thanks, goodbyes. A few bade the Eisels goodbye also, and received no answer. I last saw Ezra and his sons standing rigid as darkness closed upon them.

A week later, Abner joined the

Army. Saturday night, he strolled into Knopp's, smelling of corn, ordered a double Overholt and beer chaser, leaned against the bar, surveyed the poker players at the big center table, and announced, "I'm off to St. Louis tomorrow on the train. I'm signing up to fight the Germans." He gulped the rye, drained half the beer, and added, "Going to be a soldier."

"That so?" said Mack Knopp. "You told Elizabeth yet?"

"Yep, tomorrow or Monday I'm putting on a uniform," Abner continued, not replying to Mack's question, "and tonight I'm going to get stinking."

He didn't pay for any more liquor, and he did get stinking. At four Sunday morning, he was prancing in the square, singing:

*"If all be true that I do think,
There are five reasons why I
drink.*

*A friend, good wine, or being
dry,*

*Or lest I should be, by and by,
Or any other reason why."*

And at eight, he attended Mass with Elizabeth, as usual, only they didn't stop at the Slinkard house; they strolled hand-in-hand to the depot and sat on a bench facing the tracks. They nodded at passersby, Liz unspeaking, Abner chatting amiably. At ten, Abner glanced at the smoke plume in the distance, rose, paid the stationmaster a dollar-sixty for a ticket and again sat next to his fiancée. The train—a coal-burning engine, a coach, and four box-cars—huffed near, screeched a whistle, and halted in a cloud of steam. Abner got up, squeezed Liz's shoulder, and walked to the coach. As he was hopping aboard, someone shouted his name—Ben Slinkard, running across the platform.

"I come to see you leave," Ben panted, "and to tell you you're a son of a bitch."

"I truly am," Abner said.

"I hope you get shot bad. I hope you lose an arm."

"Maybe I will."

The whistle screeched, the engine sprayed steam, and the train rolled forward with Abner hanging onto the coach rail, waving to Liz. Liz remained on the bench until the train rounded the bend and then accompanied her father home.

Nineteen-seventeen was an evil year for the world, and for Feeley. Devil spirits boiled from the river and slithered from the woods and stalked among us. Twice, Knopp's tavern was wrecked in brawls; corn and wheat withered in a summer drought; the parish priest, Father Helm, died of snakebite.

In August, Abner Eisel returned. There had been no letters, no warning, and so the stationmaster didn't immediately recognize the forlorn stick in khaki who alighted from the train, and neither did the townspeople he limped silently past, not at first. Abner had fared badly abroad. A piece of shrapnel had ripped away his stomach. No longer was he stout, ruddy, cheerful. No, this Abner Eisel was gaunt and pale; he moved like an old woman, and the high-pitched laugh was a hoarse stutter, and the red hair had faded to the color of dirty string. Everyone, including Ben Slinkard, felt sorry for him, pitied the broken thing he had become.

We welcomed him and pretended he hadn't changed. We didn't fool him; resentment of our pity burned dully in his eyes. Something else burned in those flat eyes: a devil.

Ben offered him a job, but Abner was too weak for livery stable work. He had to accept employment at the

church, doing light chores, cleaning the rectory, occasionally serving Mass. On the altar, he was pathetic, dragging his body to the rail, mumbling responses, often forgetting the Latin. Father Hensel, the new pastor, tolerated him with ill-concealed impatience and once lost his temper and snapped a rebuke during Benediction. Abner didn't cringe, didn't respond—just accepted the priest's rebuke and stared from those flat, bedevilled eyes.

ABNER MADE A SINGLE VISIT to Knopp's about ten days after his return. He limped in and took the chair by the window. Mack Knopp greeted him loudly and said, "Drinks for free for the hero. Rye with beer to make it go?"

"No, no drinks," Abner muttered apologetically. "I can't take alcohol any more, the doctor says. My stomach."

Embarrassed, Mack said, "Sorry to hear it, Abner. How about a sodie pop?"

"No thanks. I just thought I'd look in and say hello."

"Glad you did, Abner."

"Well, I best be getting back to the church," Abner said, rising, gripping the chair arms to help himself up, flushed with the effort.

"You stop in any time," Mack called as Abner slipped out the door.

At Sunday Mass, Father Hensel read the banns, and you could hear a tiny, astonished gasp escape a hundred lips as the congregation realized what the priest had said; Abner Eisel and Elizabeth Slinkard were to be married early in October.

During the Saturday night poker game at Knopp's, Doc Lieber confided another fact concerning Abner and Liz.

"It'll be a sorry honeymoon," Doc

told the rest of the players. "Confidentially, that bomb hit more than his belly. He's lucky he doesn't sing soprano."

The group snickered, and someone drawled, "Ask me, he's damn lucky he don't have to lay that Liz. She is a ugly woman."

"Ugly or no, she deserves better than she'll ever get from Eisel," Doc said.

"Why you figure she's doing it?" Mack asked from the bar. "Marrying him, I mean."

"I guess for Liz, the marrying is important," Doc replied, "Being somebody's wife. Putting a Missus in front of her name."

"The Missus ain't no bargain if the Eisel comes with it," Mack said.

Most of us shared Mack's opinion, but with small town hypocrisy, we attended the ceremony, brought gifts to the reception at the Slinkard parlor, wished the newlyweds happiness. It was a dreary affair; neither bride nor groom smiled throughout the whole miserable afternoon, and Ben's attempts at merrymaking rang tinny, and a bit stupid. His daughter Weezy seemed embarrassed for him; she kept her pretty face carefully blank, her comments politely neutral. We had only one thing to be grateful for: none of Abner's family bothered to attend.

THAT WINTER, it stormed early and frequently. The new Mr. and Mrs. Eisel became familiar sights trudging through the snow, the walking wound that was Abner hanging onto his wife's bulk, going slowly, painfully from the tiny bungalow Ben had built for them, up the hill, past the shrine to St. Pascal's. Strangers thought they were old, the oldest couple in town, and it was hard to believe that Abner was

twenty-five, Liz twenty-three. They went unnoticed and unremarked, a part of Feeley's atmosphere. We mostly forgot they existed.

We had other concerns. Negroes, for instance. A lot of the townspeople were worried about the steady influx of blacks into our county from Arkansas. We ignorant, uneducated rednecks feared the ignorant, uneducated blacks would do—what? I honestly can't remember why we were so disturbed. The blacks didn't dare settle anywhere near town—the law Jabez Eisel had invoked was still on the books—and so we didn't even see them unless business took us to the stretch of river near the railroad bridge. Yet their proximity bothered us, scared the women and riled the men. My father and his friends formed a vigilance committee—not precisely a Ku Klux Klan, because the Klan didn't approve of Catholics; rather, a group of citizens with unsure plans, undirected determination, and shotguns. Especially shotguns. They carried the weapons to meetings in our kitchen, emblems of righteous wrath, and discussed mounting patrols and . . . frankly, terrorizing the river colony. They never did, though. Until the hayride.

The hayride. Up to this point, my story has been easy to tell. The history I've given you didn't touch me directly; I was a youngster, a nicely behaved one, present at some of the events, viewing some at a remove. But the hayride is different. I participated. The guilt is mine. Oh, certainly, we were possessed by a devil, Abner's devil, but I can't help feeling we cooperated, we gave it access to our souls.

How to start . . . ?

Begin with the pulpit. Father Hensel announced that the church was sponsoring a Halloween hayride

for the parish youth. Chaperones would be provided. I decided to go. Why not? I was too old for trick-or-treating, and I really had no desire to steal gates or toss burning bags of manure onto doorsteps or commit similar mischiefs.

A rash of flu was going around town that Fall, so only seven of us teenagers met at the foot of the hill, near the Blessed Virgin shrine, on Halloween night, 1918. Fine weather, it was, the air full of tang, the moon fat and orange, the stars steady and sharp. The three girls contributed picnic baskets loaded with cookies and fried chicken; we four boys supplied gallons of soft cider and bushels of apples. We gathered in a holiday mood to wait for the wagon and chaperones, joking, gossiping, gently flirting. I concentrated on Weezy Slinkard; a lovely child, Weezy—five feet tall, cascade of honied hair, cream complexion, a rounding body. If there was sexual tension between us—a modern psychologist would insist there was—we didn't acknowledge it to ourselves. We were good, chaste, Catholic kids.

The wagon appeared at the south end of Central Street, heaped high with hay, drawn by two spavined dray horses, and approached us. We could see a man and a woman, stiff as pitchforks, silhouetted against the twilight sky, and as the wagon stopped, we recognized them—our chaperones, Mr. and Mrs. Abner Eisel. We pitched baskets and jugs into the wagon and scooted into the fresh, sweet-smelling hay, me next to Weezy.

"You going to have fun tonight," Abner said, his feathery voice enthusiastic. "Yes sir, boys and girls, you going to have fun. I got a special treat planned for you."

HE CLUCKED, shook the reins, and the ride began. Soon, we were driving along the river road; the orange moon paced us, shining in dappled flashes through the trees, skidding atop the distant bluffs. Weezy's hand was a small, thrilling pressure in my palm.

"I learned a lot overseas," Abner was saying. "A lot of interesting facts. For instance, I learned Halloween isn't really a Christian holiday, no matter what the priests and nuns say. No, they was celebrating it in olden times before there *was* Christianity. The forest folk held it special. It was the day they called up Samhain, their favorite god."

We creaked, we swayed, and I grew drowsy. I heard Abner's voice, a singsong chattering, in fragments:

"... god of the dead ... winter god ... called him to show the future ... sacrifices ... priestesses ..."

I tried to force myself awake and failed. It seemed important to hear, to understand his meaning, but I couldn't focus my attention. I was dimly aware of Weezy's body pressing lightly on mine, and I sensed we were passing the Negro colony, and that Abner was voicing no words I could recognize. He was chanting, musically:

"... *Enimod non mus sunnid* ..."

Something in the garbled syllables—were they Latin?—chilled me; I didn't know what.

The wagon stopped in a clearing between the river and the bluffs. Abner slid to the ground and ordered us to gather firewood. Like sleepwalkers, we obeyed. Abner piled several armloads of dry branches in a pyramid, put hay on top, and touched a match to it. The fire smouldered, caught.

Abner beckoned; Liz stepped into



the circle of firelight carrying a basket and moved among us, giving each of us an apple.

"Now for the surprise," Abner said. "Throw the apples into the fire."

The moment my apple smacked into the flames, I felt my will shrivel; the *me*-ness of myself receded to a tiny corner of my being. I was a puppet, being manipulated by gnarled, alien fingers.

Abner produced a knife from his pocket, snapped it open and, squatting, thrust the blade into the fire. "Priests will lie to you," he said. "They say theirs is the only god. A lie. Such a puny god, He is, clothing himself in *bread*. The olden gods are strong. They've bided the centuries, waiting, and the waiting is done now. The world is ready for them again. My brothers and I, we've always known the olden gods the priests say are devils. We've kept them pent inside with whiskey. That's the use of whiskey, to hold them down. But my belly's shot away, lost fighting their

war, and I can't drink, and the gods are loose, my gods, yours. You feel him, Samhain, don't you? He has a hold on you and he won't let go. You'll serve him, and it'll be fun, and it'll make you *his*."

He stood, held the red-glowing blade for us to see. "I am his . . . instrument. I'm going to put his mark on you."

He touched the knife to my cheek; the sting was sharp, but remote. *Me* fled, out of my body, to a spot above the clearing where *me* observed him branding my classmates, raising ugly welts on all their faces—except Weezy's.

"Samhain has chosen," he cried triumphantly.

"No," Liz shrieked. "Not my sister."

"Samhain has chosen," Abner repeated. "Will you defy him?"

Liz slumped, defeated.

Abner pointed to my body. "You have lust for her, don't you?"

My body nodded yes.

"Undress her," he commanded.

I saw my hands fumble Weezy's buttons, tug the dress away, tear the slip and underclothing.

Abner pushed the naked girl, as impassive as a mannequin, to the center of the circle and howled:

"Samhain heed your servants give us this day your blessing and protection reveal to us the future that we may serve you . . ."

In the howling, the echo of another ritual: *Domine non sum dignus* . . .

And we, our bodies, danced around her to the cadence of the incantation, pausing to pummel, to slap, to kick, until she fell. (Did we do unspeakable things to her? No, the unspeakable is a luxury of genteel generations; now, *no* words are left unsaid. But I will not say them; consult your personal foulness.)

WHEN WE HAD FINISHED, Abner gave the knife to Liz.

"Please," Liz whispered.

"You are a virgin. The rite demands a virgin woman perform the sacrifice."

Tears gleaming in her eyes, Liz

knelt by Weezy, tenderly lifted her head, and drew the blade across her throat. Blood gushed abruptly. Weezy half rose, and pitched headlong into the fire. The flames flared, and in their yellow heart I saw two human forms.

"*There's* your future, husband," Liz said.

The dance ceased; our bodies collapsed, filmed with sweat, muscles limp and twitching. A stink of burning meat filled the air.

Weezy lay in the embers, torn, burned, dead.

"Carry her to the wagon," Abner said. Wearily, I shouldered the corpse and flung it into the hay.

"We got to fix the blame," Abner said as Liz boosted him onto the driver's seat.

We climbed in, and Abner clucked to the horses, and we set off. I was still not wholly myself; a piece of me remained apart, observing, like a child looking at the etchings of hell in a catechism, astonished and secretly delighted at such depravity. Another

piece saw where we were, on the road leading to the bridge. I stared at the moon, shrunken to a pale glow, orangeness and splendor vanished. I sat with only inches of the wooden tailgate beneath me—straining, straining away from the corpse that seemed to swell, absorbing the night and the odor of hay and the river's musk into one monstrous bloat of decay. Then we were swaying along an unfamiliar track and in the moonlight I glimpsed crude fences, an occasional pump, and tin roofs that seemed to hang unsupported, as though some maniacal carpenter had begun cabins at the top and forgot to complete them.

Abner's voice: "Whoa."

The wagon lurched to a stop. I was jolted back, and my flailing hand brushed a naked foot; it felt like a dried corn husk on a cold morning.

"Heave her out," Abner said.

I took the dead ankles, someone else took the shoulders, and we hurled Weezy to the dirt.

Abner clucked. The horses galloped, seemingly glad to be free of the extra hundred pound weight.

Abner drove directly to my house. There, my classmates scattered. Abner followed me inside, leaving Liz to tend the animals.

"Go to bed," Abner told me, and again, I obeyed.

Laying huddled in my quilt, gazing at a ceiling I couldn't see and wasn't sure existed, I overheard Abner and my father in the kitchen. I heard every word.

"It was the colored, sir, I swear. They came on us like red Indians and they dragged poor Weezy Slinkard off into the woods."

"Which way was they heading?"

"South, off toward Niggertown."

No, I wanted to say. *It was us, the Eisels made us . . .* But I didn't. My

tongue was nerveless, inert, a useless slab in my mouth. So, instead, I lay and listened: to the heavy tread of father's boots on the porch; to the slamming of doors; to shouts from the direction of the square; to the thudding of hooves . . .

Maybe, later, I actually heard the shotgun blasts. I *think* I did, but probably not; after all, Niggertown was five miles away.

I must have slept.

GOING TO EIGHT O'CLOCK
MASS, I stumbled over something on the porch steps. It was father's 12-gauge. The stock, I noticed, was cracked.

Ordinarily, the Mass on the day after Halloween—All Saint's Day, All Hallows Day—is one of the joyous Masses, a feast. You sing halleluliah and praise the Lord; the priest wears white and says, "Blessed are the pure, for they shall see God." But that morning, the vestments were black—it was to be a Mass for the dead and the priest would plead, "Deliver us from the gates of hell," and we, the congregation, kneeling with bowed heads, fingering rosaries and prayer books, breathing in the graveyard scent of incense, we silently and fervently echoed his plea.

Only women and children took communion: no men. The six of us, the hayriders, also remained in our pews.

Abner Eisel—he took communion. He was serving, and servers always receive the Eucharist. Liz didn't, though.

Father turned and said, "Ite missa est," and Abner responded, "Deo gratias," and we left the church, went into the November sunshine, not as a congregation, but as isolated individuals, parcels of guilt, eyes downcast, mute and ashamed.

IN A SENSE, I kept going. Oh, I remained in Feeley until Spring, physically, but the instant I stepped from St. Pascal's, I began my long wandering. To stay would have been impossible for me. So I wandered, and found various educations, and years and places were as cascades of broken glass. Occasionally, I sought forgiveness. I would be passing a church in a strange city on a Saturday afternoon, I would feel a tugging, I would furtively join the line at the confessional. "Bless me father, for I have sinned . . ." The recital was, inevitably, dreary: this many fornications, that many brawls, much drunkenness. Then I would confess Halloween, 1918. I was never believed, save once. Most of my anonymous confessors scoffed, dismissed me, withheld the magic "Te absolve"; a few enlightened, trendy priests recommended psychiatric help—the fools. I needed God, not Freud.

On April 4, 1968, however, I did finally receive absolution. You recall the date; a man was assassinated, remember? Shot in Memphis, where I happened to be living—on welfare, in a ghetto. That day, my white skin was, on those mean streets, a mark of Cain. Walking down a slum avenue, I became frightened and ran into a stone building, to hide in the skirts of Holy Mother like a panicked child. There, in the box, I confessed the sex, the fighting, the booze and, at last, I told of the Eisels and their devil.

"I'm not lying," I said when I finished.

From the other side of the veil, a croaking voice said, "I believe you. I do."

"Can I be forgiven?"

"I'm not sure you've sinned. Make your act of contrition, anyway."

THE HAUNT OF HORROR



Because I dreaded the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, I did. I hope the rest, the hayriders and my father and his vigilance committee, found similar forgiveness, somewhere, sometime. Let the gates of Paradise welcome all, even the Eisels. For they, too, performed an act of contrition, and in doing it, fulfilled the prophesy they saw wavering in the yellow heart of the flames.

I suppose it was Liz's idea to do it publicly. They could have done their devilslaying privately, with a mason jar; instead, they did it with J.T.S. Brown Kentucky Bourbon at the front table in Knopp's Tavern.

THE NIGHT OF NOVEMBER 2, 1918, Liz and Abner marched into Knopp's, smiling. Abner sat by the window. Liz strode to the bar, pulled a coin purse from her pocket, carefully counted two bills and a handful of coins, handed them to Mack, and said loudly, "We'll have a bottle of the best this will buy."

Mack glanced at the money, shrugged, gave Liz her purchase.

"Two glasses, please," she said.

"Pitcher of water?" Mack asked.

"That won't be necessary, thank you."

Liz crossed the room, sat, and filled the glasses to the brim. She pushed Abner's drink across the table, saying, simply, "Husband." She put hers to her lips, and with a face blank as muslin, swallowed. Abner gulped twice, and his glass was empty.

"We can enjoy another round, wife," he said. His hand trembling, he poured whiskey.

"Abner, best not overdo it," said Mack.

"Can't get too much of a good thing," Abner replied jovially, and drank, and refilled.

"Might be bad for your condition," Mack protested. "Doc says—"

"Doc's only a *medical* doctor," Liz said. "This is none of his business."

To me, Mack said, "Run fetch Doc."

I ignored him. Mack threw his apron on the floor and scurried out. He returned with Doc. By then, the bottle was a quarter emptied. Doc didn't interfere, either. No, he just perched on a stool and watched the Eisels drinking, relentlessly. It occurred to me that the doctor was a vigilance committee member.

Abner raised his glass and muttered, "Here's to the other reason why."

HE CONSUMMATED HIS TOAST, and as Liz spilled more bourbon into the glasses, his mouth stretched, curled upward at the corners—a hideous parody of a grin. His cheeks were mottled, grey; and although the November air was chilly, raindrop-sized beads of sweat dripped from his brow. He clutched his belly. "Hurts, wife," he murmured.

"It'll be over soon," Liz said.

Maternally, as though she were feeding a baby, Liz placed the almost empty bottle to his lips and upended it. Spittle dribbled down his chin.

"Say the prayer, husband."

He droned, "O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee . . . The words, Liz. What are the words?"

"Because I dread the loss of heaven—"

". . . loss of heaven and pains of hell . . . Most of all, offended Thee, my Lord."

"Go on. I firmly resolve—"

". . . with the help of thy grace to confess my sins, do penance, and amend my life. Amen."

Amen.

□

PELICAN'S CLAWS



ARTHUR BYRON COVER

The Raymonds were a pleasant couple . . . although their preoccupation with the occult was just a touch . . . unfortunate.

Illustrated by Dan Green

In 1571 an anonymous Royal Prussian wrote a book which dealt with the realities behind mythology. Church authorities immediately suppressed the book; they passed edicts against even mentioning its name. Their failure to purge Europe of the book is evidenced by the large number of edicts passed throughout the centuries. The Church repeatedly registered two complaints against the book: 1) that it described in too much detail the proper rituals for supplicating the old gods and 2) that the creatures it portrays never existed, therefore it was completely false. The Church never admitted that there might have been something to the book, although it was embarrassed by the famous case of the monk who claimed to have seen the old pelicans and wrote verse on their love for their children.

*—From the Introduction to
Occult Literature by
Lord Chadwell, Mirror
Press, 1932*

THEY came both to visit us and to ask us to help unload all the stuff crammed in their U-Haul. They seemed nice enough at first and we were only too glad to help. They were George and Sylvia Raymond, our new next-door neighbors, and George was going to work as a sanitarian at the Health Department with my husband. He was short and fat and talked the way short and fat people from New York State talk, and he wore a faded work-shirt the day we met him. Sylvia nodded a lot and occasionally mumbled a few words. In every respect they acted the way I expect newlyweds to act.

After George dropped off the U-Haul at a gas station, I cooked dinner for the two of them. Some of the nurses and summertime student-

workers came over to get acquainted with them. It was part of the pattern we had had to endure for months, with the government finally coming through and hiring all those people at once. I had a good time until my husband Jerry got too drunk and made vaguely concealed references to my performances in bed; he knows I'm better than *that*. Besides, he's not so goddamn hot himself.

I liked the Raymonds from the first. George talked about his college days and the two of us compared experiences. Sylvia told him to slow down on his drinking; he didn't and offered her one, which she took with a sly smile. Well, Sylvia got drunk after two drinks and she hung on to George for a time. They reminded me of the fraternity couples I had seen several years before. Soon Sylvia excused them both with a, "It has been a hard day," and they left. We wished them a good night and then the entire Health Department staff got plastered. It was agony to get up for work at the newspaper office the next morning.

George and Sylvia got their house in order rather quickly. I don't know how they did it; George was always with Jerry on free tours of Blackton County and learning the many jobs sanitarians have to do; Sylvia seemed like she was always shopping somewhere. As soon as they figured they had all their odds-and-ends in the right places, they invited us over to see. I was surprised at how grey the rooms looked; the staff had painted the walls white and waxed the floors before they arrived. Now dark fuzzy rugs with intricate red and golden designs and a heavy dust odor covered up all their hard work. (Jerry said the rugs smelled like sulphur, but I said he was being an ass.)
Demonic glass statuettes rested on

the mantelpiece and the tabletops. The bedrooms and the living room were lined with tall hardcover books I had never heard of.

Jerry sat with Sylvia in the kitchen; he drank beer and talked. George was all too happy to lecture me about his books. His nasal voice grated on me, but after a while I listened only to what he said and not the way he said it. According to George, all his books were worth over a hundred dollars apiece. They concerned subject matter which had been skimmed over in my ancient and medieval history college courses; I had the impression George could have talked an hour about each book. One volume was *The Phallic Rituals* by a nineteenth century French nobleman; George claimed it explained the real reasons why the early phallic celebrations evolved into a primitive form of comic theater. *Imitations* by Sir Thomas More's grandson recorded several incidents of men patterning themselves after mythological beings. *The Wei-mochieh* and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* were Oriental philosophy. *The Old Gods* was a reproduction of a Latin scroll about powerful beings who ruled the Earth long before the birth of man. It was suddenly well past midnight when Jerry apparently became jealous of George because I was spending so much time with him; he demanded in a nice way that we go home to bed.

I don't know why we had to go to bed; we didn't do anything. Although both windows were open, it was too hot and stuffy for me to sleep. I got out of bed and went to the kitchen for something to eat. I couldn't find anything so I went outside to smoke a cigarette. I walked around in the backyard and ran my fingers over the hedge top. The moon cast a blue haze

over the mountains and the clouds billowed. I thought about what George had told me. For some reason I had forgotten most of the explicit details. I was unable to stand still. When I was with Jerry I felt alone, but that time it was worse without him. A white cat running across the yard frightened me enough to send me back to the kitchen, where I chain-smoked three cigarettes. To keep my mind off other things I wondered about what I always wonder about—what to cook for dinner, if I would lose my temper in front of my boss when he told one of his unfunny dirty jokes, and why Jerry had let his inability to sire children wreck our marriage. I went back to bed at five o'clock and finally got to sleep about the time to wake up for Mass.

At church I was covered by bright sunlight distorted through red, purple and yellow stained glass. For once I did not merely mouth my prayers; the firm voice of Father White comforted me. By the time the service was over I had discounted any inexplicable fears I might have had and blamed my sleepless night on Jerry's bad temper.

Yahweh is a vengeful God; we must acknowledge all His handiwork. The old gods of His creation are not dead; the old myths are not fictions; the old creatures are not extinct. They are inside our hearts, and we ignore them; we do not know how close they once were to the literal truth. For instance, when Borges and Guerrero compiled The Book of Imaginary Begins, they realized that each creature was an archetype partially characteristic of man and accordingly described each one with meaningful symbols, but also regarded them as fictions. Consider their short

essay on the medieval pelican. They had never seen one and therefore thought the old writings to be either deliberate fabrications or superstitions. They could not know that people had actually seen those woebegone birds. The old pelicans still exist; they have been in seclusion for centuries. Nevertheless we must pay homage to them, for they are real. We must show that we respect the way they must live, for they are part of us.

—*The Black Magic Book*
by Langdon Andrews,
Mirage Press, 1970

THAT AFTERNOON George and Jerry had to cut off a cow's head and take it to a lab where it could be tested for rabies, so Sylvia and I had our first chance to talk alone. I discovered I was jealous of her because she was ten years my junior. She was also a lot prettier than I ever had been, and once or twice she mentioned all the children she would like to have. I didn't feel like telling her all my problems just yet so I talked about some of the local fat-cats and about who cheated on whom. When I asked her if she wanted me to help her find a job to keep her from getting bored, she replied that her days were filled with more important tasks. Soon George and Jerry returned; Sylvia and I had run out of things to say and we had to listen to Jerry tell about how he had gotten his brand-new jacket all blood-stained.

The winter months passed in the usual fashion. We put a bit more money in the bank, went to Jerry's family reunion (nice people, but somewhat nervewracking), and threatened each other with a divorce a few times. That winter was the coldest Blackton County had seen in several decades. New records for low

temperatures were set every month. The air was a dry silver mist on the distant landscape; the frost lasted until well past noon. The sun seemed to be more remote than it had in other years; it was always weak and pale.

Jerry and I spent most of our evenings with the Raymonds. I don't know why; we usually could not find much to talk about; Sylvia was relaxed and open with me only when we were alone. The four of us watched a lot of television and played bridge until Jerry and I decided it was causing too many arguments between us. Often George sat in another room and read a yellow-paged book (he seemed to be taking his hobby more and more seriously than when he first came to Blackton) while Sylvia helped me with the dishes and Jerry drank beer. The few times the four of us were engaged in serious conversations, I found it impossible to disagree with George on some minor point; Jerry always defended him. When I asked Jerry why, he said that for some reason he was afraid of hurting George's feelings.

One day I noticed Sylvia was putting on weight. Before I had a chance to feel superior she told me she was pregnant. That was good enough reason for a celebration and the Health Department staff got drunk again. This time the party was held at the Director's house. Dr. Burton liked to give parties because his wife had left him several years earlier and he could have as much fun as he wanted to.

George had been getting slightly obnoxious the past week and at the party he was worse than ever. During a lull in the conversations, he unwrapped a huge volume he had found in a secondhand bookstore in Roanoke. He showed it to a few

unimpressed people. Suddenly he lost his temper and threw his drink on the floor. He lectured us on the book; his manner was just short of a madman's. Everybody allowed him to rant because they didn't know what else to do. The longer he spoke, the louder his voice became. He looked rather comical standing there beside the bar, but nevertheless I found myself almost believing he was telling the truth. At the same time I knew every word was ridiculous.

George said he had been trapped by the pelicans. Not the dull white pelicans of today, but a different, more mysterious breed of pelicans. He said they represented man in that they too had fallen from grace and had to suffer for their sins. He recounted several fables of men who had tried to imitate chimeras, centaurs and gods; he believed he one day would have to imitate the pelicans. He did not know why he had to be punished, but Yahweh had given him His instructions. George would imitate the pelicans because it would mean a long life for his children to come.

Gradually George lost his energy. He stuttered and took long pauses between sentences. Finally he stopped, as if waiting for us to reply.

One of the nurses said she had to go home to see if her daughter would come in on time, and that was everybody's cue to leave. Dr. Burton signaled to Jerry and I that he wanted to talk with us when everybody had gone. Sylvia and George lingered behind for a few minutes, but they left soon enough.

When we were alone with Dr. Burton he mixed us drinks. He asked Jerry if he had noticed anything unusual about George. My husband was properly embarrassed and blamed it all on the booze. Dr. Bur-

ton said that was probably it, but to keep an eye on George just the same. Jerry didn't say anything, but I knew he would do what Dr. Burton asked.

The next morning I was still upset over the incident. At the newspaper office I said nothing to anybody until the boss tried to tell me a dirty joke and I told him to shove it. It was not as satisfying as I had hoped it to be, but at least I got paid for not doing two weeks of work. When I got home Sylvia was scrubbing her front porch—a surprisingly independent thing for a pregnant woman to do on a cold winter morning—and she could tell from my angry expression that I had been fired. I told her the how and why in a few profane sentences and she offered to fix me some coffee.

Fifteen minutes after we started talking, I brought up George's behavior at the party. Sylvia seemed calm, not uncomfortable in the least. She said that just before they were married, she had had a dream about pelicans and became afraid to have children. George convinced her that she had nothing to fear. Lately George had been studying pelican lore in detail and the alcohol had made him say some strange, nonsensical things.

Which was essentially what Jerry had said to Dr. Burton. But I didn't like the way Sylvia had been tapping her fingers on the tabletop toward the end of her explanation. Since it was time for me to fix lunch and try to tactfully tell Jerry I had been fired, I excused myself.

The word pelican comes from the Greek phrase "to hew with an axe." The old pelicans were smaller than the ones of today; their plumage was green and yellow; their beaks were pointed and sharp; they were magical

and fascinating. Yahweh created the old pelicans so that their beauty would dazzle even Him. Graceful in flight, of noble bearing, no other bird could so completely capture the imagination of man in a time when flying was Yahweh's most puzzling and lovely invention. The old pelicans had many good reasons to be proud of themselves; and they were prouder still of their children who would one day take their place. They devoted all their time to their children and for many years forgot to set aside a day for Yahweh. This oversight caused their downfall, for Yahweh gave them a horrible choice which could be avoided. The old pelicans would be forever tainted with evil.

*—Royal Prussian Folklore
by Sir Robert Geston,
Marigold House, 1874*

NOT MUCH happened for a few months. Jerry and I considered adopting a child, but nothing came of it. I did not go back to work and read John Creasy instead. Sylvia's doctor told her she would have twins; with that knowledge she became happier and more out-going. But now I believe that was just an act so she could cover up her feelings. George was drunk most of the time; when he said something, it was usually about the old gods. Jerry kept insisting there was nothing wrong with George, but I knew better. It was common knowledge among my friends on the Health Department staff that Jerry had been sticking up for George when he failed to do his work on time. Dr. Burton fussed at Jerry because he wanted to fuss at somebody sane; Jerry was as good a person as any to blame for the work overload.

The twins were due in late summer. Blackton County had the

greyest summer I had ever seen. The trees did not grow leaves until the first weeks of June; the grass was either pale green or sickly yellow-brown. The sky was unusually cloudy; when the sun shone the wind was still chilly. The people were depressed and lazy.

At first I thought the environment was responsible for the sudden turn about in Sylvia's character; she became like her sullen husband, more like the Sylvia I had met over a year before. Often I would ask her a meaningless question, just to start a conversation, and she would snap back at me. Jerry and I stopped visiting the Raymonds; because we had formerly spent so much time with them, we had loosened our contacts with other friends and did not see them either. I guess we became like the Raymonds; we found ourselves brooding over nothing in particular and waiting for something to happen.

We did see them in the hospital after the twins were born. The Blackton County Hospital is just behind the Health Department and Jerry, along with other staff members, slipped off from work to meet me and several spouses and to congratulate the Raymonds. When Jerry and I entered Sylvia's room, George was sitting beside the bed and was looking at his wife. She was holding a child in each arm, but she didn't act at all like a proud mother; instead of beaming at her children she stared at George. Nobody said much of anything, not even that the children were lovely. After a while Jerry and I left, complaining that the light green walls made us uncomfortable.

The Saturday after Sylvia returned home with her children it looked as if it would rain all day, but it never did.

Jerry and I sat in the house; he watched baseball and I tried to read Agatha Christie. We didn't have too many lights on. We forgot about supper, and eventually we were just sitting in our den, not pretending to do anything. We looked at each other and thought nothing. I remember believing that it was better than an argument, but now I'm not so sure.

Like any mother the female pelican wanted to show affection for her children beyond merely providing them with food and shelter; she wanted to kiss and caress them. Her beak and claws were too sharp and she unwittingly stabbed them and tore them apart. When she realized she was hurting them, she became all the more impassioned and tried to comfort them in the same fashion; her children died because of her love. The father was as confused and as grief-stricken as she. He wanted to help his children at any price to himself. He ripped open his chest with his beak and his blood spilled over the slain bodies. Somewhat like the phoenix, the children were resurrected by Yahweh, but their father was dead forever.

—*Ibid.*

JERRY AND I were still sitting in our den well past dusk. The lamp beside my chair was the only one on. I had lost my place in the Christie novel and didn't think it was interesting enough to find out where I had stopped reading. Jerry said we should probably wash the yellow walls sometimes; I nodded just so it would look like I was paying attention to him. I was lighting a cigarette when I noticed the green glow coming through the window.

Jerry looked out to see what it was. I put out my cigarette and walked to

him. The green glow covered his face; it had an effect I would expect in a nightclub. I did not look outside; Jerry said that the Raymonds had built a bonfire and had thrown ground copper ore in it to make it green. I wanted to ask what for but he turned away and started outside before I had a chance. I hesitated for a few moments; I figured it was just a strange experiment of George's, something like holding a lit candle upside down in the center of a crossroads and reciting the Lord's Prayer backwards. Then I knew there was more to it than that and I followed Jerry outside.

On our back porch I heard George shouting. I don't know what he was saying or what language he was saying it in. Jerry had already rounded the hedges and was in their backyard. I felt afraid and alone, as I had that night George lectured me on the secrets in his old books. The sky must have cleared in the last hour or so, because the stars were clear and bright; there was no moon. It was extremely cold for a summer night; I wished I had brought my windbreaker. I also wished for my cigarettes, but the thought of going back inside to my empty home frightened me more than finding out what the Raymonds were up to. I was surprised at myself for wanting to be with Jerry, and I ran around the hedge. As I made the turn I almost collided into him. Without looking at the green bonfire, I asked him what was going on. He didn't answer, so I had to look myself.

The fire cast a tinsel light over the Raymond's yard. It was a few moments before I could pick out all the important details; as soon as my mind registered one, it blanked out knowledge of another. The book George had shown at the party was

open on a rostrum. George stood beside the rostrum, facing the fire. He was not looking at the book; apparently he had memorized the ceremony. I think he switched languages a few times.

Suddenly George stopped talking. I heard Sylvia sobbing; she was on her knees and was holding an axe coated with what looked like a black fluid in the green light. The corpses of her children were in front of her.

George picked up a knife from the rostrum and walked toward the corpses. He stopped when his feet touched them and he held the knife over his chest. He looked to the sky; he screamed something about the old pelicans. Before he could stab himself Jerry ran behind him and

grabbed his arm. My husband pushed George off balance, making him stumble. Jerry hit him on the face and George fell backwards, almost falling into the green fire. Sylvia dropped the axe, jumped up, and hit Jerry on the chest; she begged him to let George save her children. Jerry pushed her down. George had not gotten up; Jerry had knocked him unconscious. Jerry picked up the knife and the axe and turned away from them, walking toward me.

I don't know how long Jerry and I stood there and watched them. We saw George regain consciousness and try to comfort his wife, who was holding part of one corpse to her chest and was praying for the mercy of Yahweh. □



If you enjoyed THE HAUNT OF HORROR, you may find food for thought in Marvel's new GIANT-SIZE COMICS—featuring fear-fraught tales of terror and suspense!

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THE JEWEL IN THE ASH

JOHN K. DIOMEDE

Illustrated by Walt Simonson

For Marjorie Weaver

337 D'Aubont Street
New Orleans, Louisiana
December 21, 1941

Dear Ernst:

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE for me to begin a letter, knowing that it has been through my negligence alone that we have not communicated in more than five years? Surely I can plead a lack of time, a surfeit of grief, a loathing to immerse myself in any of the activities in which I previously found such satisfaction and fulfillment. But such excuses are ridiculous, even as they form in my mind, prior even to their appearance here in black and white. Five years! What fool could claim that the entire time had been filled to the utmost, so that even a moment's intermission could not be found to dash off a quick note?

Well, then, what explanation have I left? None, dear Ernst; I hope and trust that your friendship will permit you to forgive me and that, further, you will listen to the history of these intervening years as they have involved myself and those whom you have come to know and respect. I am certain, my oldest and best of friends, that my story will astound you. (I realize that in the past you have always been somewhat skeptical of my reports, my memoirs. And this new adventure, coming *after* the one which we all so sadly believed to be the concluding chapter, must therefore tax your credulity to the utmost.) But perhaps there is something to be learned, something which at the least may shed some faint light on the most horrible events which have continued in the world, without a day's respite, in their awful

procession these many months.

You have no doubt already noticed from the return address on this page, that I no longer reside in New York. Shortly after my last letter I found the surroundings so depressing, so cheerlessly filled with memories of my late companion, that I quickly became convinced that a change was necessary. Dr. Warm, who had been my constant friend and teacher throughout my adult career, had come to some enigmatic end while battling his twin brother and eternal foe, Canfield (agent in our land for the Console Oscony. Both men had been consumed in a great conflagration, the tremendous holocaust created by antagonistic powers that were theirs to command, and which were unleashed for the first time to their fullest extent. Though relieved that such a terrifying force for evil as Canfield had been destroyed, I could not help my intense grief for Dr. Warm, feelings the like of which I had never before experienced. Every object in our old apartments in Manhattan reminded me of him, and of his strange though gentle ways.

Soon I could not bear it. I sought to relieve these emotional wounds by vacationing; I undertook a cruise through the West Indies, where I furthered my own studies of aboriginal and European magics; I visited for a time with Mr. Tibor Benarcek, a recent arrival to these United States, a fugitive from the mad forces with which our nation has since gone to war; and, for a short time, I took a position as curator of the Pany Institute's collection of American and Caribbean artifacts relating to witchcraft and superstition. But each time, sooner or later, I had to return to New York, and each time I discovered that the homecoming was more difficult. About two

years ago I gave up and relocated here.

New Orleans is this country's most beautiful city, Ernst, and surely one of the loveliest in the world. There is more than enough here to keep my mind occupied and my senses delighted. But even the pleasures of America's only truly European metropolis could do little to remove the constant sting of grief. My physical condition deteriorated; I was littled concerned with the amount of sleep I obtained, or with my proper diet. And, in this most epicurean of cities, that is almost a crime! At last, fearing for my own health, I engaged a housekeeper to maintain my quarters and relieve me of those petty responsibilities. But my mental condition continued to worsen. I was going mad; the shock of Dr. Warm's final battle had robbed me of some of my accustomed stability. I suppose that despite all our previous adventures, I myself had not truthfully comprehended the dangers involved. After Dr. Warm's demise in the cataclysm of sorcery I began to understand his dedication and his courage, and realize how foolish I had been to think that I could ever have been of any service to him. The forces of adversity are far more ruthless and potent than ever we had imagined.

MME. DE CROUT, the housekeeper, was a kindly old woman. But she was at the same time the most meddlesome person I have ever known. Her husband runs a grimy pet shop nearby, on Chartres Street; he is a brusque, bristly character, and I suppose his wife had few opportunities to practice her intrusive ways with him. I became the sole beneficiary of her interests. In some respects I am thankful; she made *certain* that I ate well, that I

went to my bed at a respectable hour and rose in the morning early enough to suit public morality, that I did not allow myself to fall into self-pitying depressions, and that I understood that a man of my position will suffer in the afterlife for my bachelor ways.

Now Mme. de Crout plays an important part in my present adventure, as I'm sure you must already guess; otherwise, Ernst, you know that I'd hardly spend the time discussing her. To get to the point, then, I need only say that my concerned housekeeper took upon herself the duty of restoring my exhausted equilibrium. That her schemes were purely in my own best interest I have no doubt; she was genuinely interested in seeing me returned to my former self, though she certainly had her own motives for that. I had become a kind of project for her. Where she had failed to make over her rude husband in the image she had chosen for him, she hoped to make good that failure in me. But to accomplish these laudable ends she needed certain personal articles, access to which she understood I would never permit.

There comes a time when necessity routs all reason, and direct action overcomes one's standards of conduct. Mme. de Crout recognized this truism, even if our churches and police departments won't. I returned home one August afternoon to find my room in a vague disorder. I knew at once the cause.

I stepped out into the hall. "Madame de Croute," I called. There was no answer. I walked down the corridor to the back of the house. At the end was a screen door, leading out into a charming patio, an enclosed garden so filled with banana trees and semi-tropical plants as to make one feel swallowed up suddenly by

jungle. Only when one recognized the manufactured nature of the clever fountain, or studied the faded bricks that were occasionally visible among the verdant tangle, did one recall how firmly in the middle of a great city the quiet house was. It was this lush, silent, completely luxurious atmosphere that had restored my health and my sensibilities. I did not want them shattered anew by the unskilled fiddlings of a shrewish old woman.

There were no sounds in the courtyard, except the pleasant trickling of water from the fountain, and the soft, murmurous buzzing of insects. The air was warm and humid, but among the tall, leafy plants I was wrapped in a comfortable, sleepy shade. "Madame de Crout!" I called again, louder. A moment later she stuck her head from a second story window.

"Yes, monsieur?" she said. "What is it that you want?"

I sighed. She was forcing me to play through the whole foolish scene. "My room," I said calmly. "It seems as though someone has been searching it for something. Have you heard any suspicious noises today?"

Mme. de Crout paused, pretending to think back over the morning's activities. "Noises, Monsieur Diomedé? No, I've heard no unusual sounds. I am horrified to think that someone has violated the security of your quarters. I will have to tell my husband of this. He will no doubt take proper steps. Whoever it was, I'm sure he'll be apprehended and punished. Did you notice that anything was missing?"

I glared at her. Looking up, my eyes were squinted against the painfully bright sun. The old woman's head peered down from between the green shutters, her expression unconcerned and somewhat bored. I

spoke slowly and softly. "No," I said, "nothing seems to be missing. That's what makes me curious. I have heard of few burglars who would pass up what valuables I have, all of which are in plain view and easily pocketed."

"Well, then," said Mme. de Crout with a laugh, "perhaps you are exaggerating the situation!"

"Perhaps so. But the next time it happens, I shall go straight to the police."

"*Bien*," she said. "That is a good idea. I doubt whether we shall have such an unfortunate occurrence again."

"Good afternoon, Mme. de Crout," I said, my anger spent, my nonviolent nature just beginning to see the humor of the situation. "I'm sorry to have disturbed you."

"Not at all," she said blithely. "That is an employer's prerogative." Her head disappeared back inside her chamber, and I took a seat upon the white iron bench that was placed next to the fountain.

IT WAS NOT TRUE that nothing was missing in my room. One of the first things that I had checked was my special notebook of addresses; this I kept hidden in an old, worn cardboard suitcase, beneath a false bottom. That someone like Mme. de Crout had discovered it could only mean that my solicitous housekeeper had made previous exploratory searches among my belongings. No doubt she knew as much about my past as anyone with a more legitimate source of information. The completely unconvincing show of ransacking was done to draw suspicion away from her, when in fact she had most likely gone straight to the notebook in its hiding place. I had no doubt that the notebook would be

returned soon, whenever I gave the old woman an opportunity to slip back into my rooms.

Two or three days passed without event and, sure enough, one evening I checked the suitcase and found my notebook replaced. I took it out and riffled through its pages, wondering to what purpose the information within had been put. A few days later, as I was leaving the house, intending to stroll down to the French Market for a breakfast of coffee and *beignets*, I met the postman. "Good morning, Mr. Diomedé," he said. "Here, you have a letter and a package today." I thanked him and took the mail, walking back to my rooms to open the parcel.

I saw from the return address on the letter that it was from Mr. Henderson Kroeger, a member of my late friend's Fraternity of occult soldiery. I had not communicated with any of these former associates in several years, since the horrible catastrophe that took the life of my dear comrade, their leader. It was with some excitement, then, that I tore open the envelope. The page enclosed read as follows:

My dear Diomedé:

It was with great joy that I received your letter, for I have often remarked to our mutual friends how sad and frustrating it is, to have you disappear and seemingly shun our company and our concern. I recognize that this has been a time of great trial for you, and I rejoice that you have at last realized that your pains can be made the less through the good thoughts and offices of your best well-wishers.

It is with even more satisfaction that I inform you that I shall indeed accept your gracious invitation. The many lures of New Orleans hold nothing for me, compared to the boundless gratification I shall receive in renewing our friendship. I shall arrive by railroad on the fifteenth of August. I have already secured accommodations at the Hotel de Grailion, through our usual channels. I cannot express how much I look forward to speaking with you again.

Until that happy time, I remain your most dutiful friend,

For a moment I was confused, but only for a single moment. I certainly had not invited any of our old associates to visit me. For many months I had decided that it were best to avoid any contacts which might remind me of the source of my present agitation. Of course, it had to be Mme. de Crout. In her well-meaning way, she had searched out the address of one of my friends from the past and invited him in a forged letter. How she learned that Kroeger was an especially dear comrade I shall never know. Perhaps it was only through the frequency with which his name appeared in marginal scribbles in the notebook.

Nevertheless, I had to prepare myself for his arrival. My secret address had been revealed, and now, for good or ill, I was to be plunged again into the life I had voluntarily quitted.

I placed the letter on my desk, turning to the package that had been delivered with it. There was no return

address on the outside, just a neatly typewritten label with my name and address. I began removing the brown wrapping paper, but I was interrupted by a familiar voice from the front of the house. "Diomedes!" the voice called. "Ho, John! I'm not made for this heat. For the love of my overworked Guardian, let me in!"

I JUMPED to my feet. Mme. de Crout had indeed been busy. I ought to have guessed that a single invitation to Kroeger would never have satisfied her. I hurried to the front and flung open the tall, double shuttered doors. "My God!" I cried. "Korpaniev! Come in!"

"Thank you," he said, smiling broadly as he always did at the slightest instigation. "I don't know how you can stand this climate. In my homeland we reserve temperatures such as this strictly for punishment."

I laughed. Korpaniev, who has figured so prominently in my previous accounts of Dr. Warm's exploits, had not yet been able to reconcile himself with the political forces which still clutch his beloved land in a fist of iron. I embraced him joyfully; of all our allies in the ceaseless struggle against the Consele Oscury and its uncountable agents throughout the world, Korpaniev had been, next to the masterly Dr. Warm himself, our greatest weapon. His uncanny ability to analyze situations and to deduce the true relations among powers and factions has proven invaluable.

In 1934, during the dreadful episode of the Estonian *chanteur*, which you may recall, Ernst, Korpaniev was instrumental in discovering the horrible collection of crumbling volumes which for so long put an end to the activities of the Baltic consortium of

the Consele Oscury. Following that harrowing adventure, Korpaniev was hunted throughout Europe by agents of the Consele; he managed to hide for a few months in the back room of a tailor's shop in Riga, but eventually fled to Germany, where the National Socialists took up the role of persecutor. Korpaniev followed an incredible route thereafter, always managing to stay just enough ahead of his pursuers: from Bremen to Zurich, then to Venice, then to Palermo, to the coast of Africa, Agheila, Tunis, Madrid, London, and, at last, to the United States. His presence now was comforting to me, as far as my own safety was concerned. I did not doubt that because of my association with Dr. Warm, the Consele maintained a lively interest in my knowledge of the Fraternity's workings.

Before I even ushered Korpaniev into the foyer and closed the shutter doors, another gentleman called to me from the sidewalk. "Pardon me," he said, in a cultured British accent. "Is this the residence of a Mr. John Keats Diomedes?"

"It is," I said curiously. "I am he."

"Ah, wonderful!" cried the stranger. "I am Mathesby. From your surprised expression, I suppose I've no doubt arrived ahead of my letter."

This was Sir Guy Feygan Mathesby, the well-known paleontologist for the British Museum, who also, secretly, was quite prominent in the hierarchy of the Fraternity. Mme. de Crout had chosen well. I was astonished to say the least, but, Ernst, nothing could have pleased me more. I introduced Mathesby to Korpaniev; they instantly struck up a warm friendship, and I led them into the house.

That was not the end of it, Ernst, you can be sure. Within the hour I

welcomed Monsieur Claude Bechet, Mr. Leslie Cobb, and Mr. William Pitt Sparrow, all of whom must be familiar to you through those memoirs of the last decade. I had seen none of these old friends and fellow-warriors in several years; similarly, while keeping up a necessary correspondence among themselves, my friends had had little personal contact, so the occasion became a wonderful reunion. I do not know how Mme. de Crout chose among the names listed in my notebook, but I myself could not have invited a more delightful group of gentlemen. We talked until dinner-time. I was on the point of inviting my comrades to accompany me to Antoine's for a superb and fitting meal, when we were interrupted by the most ghastly screams I have ever in my life heard. They were coming from the rear of the house, from my quarters to be precise. Every one of us jumped to his feet. Stunned and for the immediate moment unable to act, I looked to Korpaniev. Not so the others; while I had enjoyed the confidences of Dr. Warm and served as his biographer and aide, I had after all been only an observer. Each of my guests, however, had been trained and experienced in dealing with the sort of terrors which I still can only hazily understand. Like my old friend, these men knew the value of decisive thought and action. I must admit that I was the last of our group to leave the warm parlor, the last to enter my own apartment, the last to witness the utterly appalling scene whose final seconds were playing themselves to a conclusion there.

WE STOOD PARALYZED at the entrance to my room. Inside, Mme. de Crout knelt on the floor, shrieking. As I watched, she reached one arm

out, stretching it out as far as she could; then she fell forward, hitting the palm of her hand on the worn carpet and sliding it along. Her skin was taking on a peculiar gray, deathlike color. Her face was contorted into a fearsome mask, a ghastly visage of pain and horror. I thought perhaps that she was having some sort of fit, or an attack, an eventuality not altogether unlikely in someone of her age and temperament. My first reaction was to run for a doctor, but her movements riveted my attention. I must guiltily admit that I couldn't leave that place, so horribly fascinated was I; it is little defense to add that none of my guests were able to depart or, for more sinister reasons, render her aid.

Mme. de Crout's arm was still outflung, her torso raised only a few inches above the floor, her head swinging around, her eyes opened to an unnatural degree, her mouth gaping. Her breathing hissed in the frightful stillness. Her cries came at short intervals as she made her very slow progress across the floor. I looked in the direction she was going; I saw the package I had received earlier in the day upon my desk. It had been ripped open, no doubt by Mme. de Crout. Surely, in a rational moment under normal conditions, she would never have opened such a parcel, despite her most meddlesome nature.—Her methods were always secretive, though often naive. The package had been clawed apart, so that the evidence of her intrusion was all too plain. I must believe that the diabolic contents in some manner induced her to her fatal crime. And, too, I know that those contents had been intended to wield their loathsome influence upon me.

The old woman was losing vitality now, but some great spirit of per-

sistence was still within her. She crept toward the desk. Suddenly I spied an object on the floor, which I instantly apprehended to be the vile cause of this dreadful affair. Nevertheless, I was unable to act, to break its power over Mme. de Crout, which every second transformed her into the very image of a tortured soul in Hell.

The object toward which she was making her infinitely slow, unimaginably agonized way seemed to be a large gem, of dusky amber color, about the size of a walnut. It was cut, displaying many facets which caught and broke the light from the windows into rainbow beams of unnatural brilliance.

I suppose that Mme. de Crout had been lured to remove the thing from its cardboard container; once unmasked, its lethal properties began poisoning her. She dropped it to the floor and tried to flee. I could guess at her sudden terror, as she realized that the devil's gem would not permit her to leave. She could only watch as her own body began to age, to melt, to putrify on her very bones, as her breath wheezed and rattled in her throat, as the sound of her heartbeat grew louder and faster, finally beating in her ears like the rain of bombs over London, driving her to madness.

I felt its infernal control, as did my fellows as we watched helplessly only a few feet from the awful tableau. We could do nothing.

"Cover it!" cried Korpaniev suddenly. Precisely! If only someone had realized that a minute earlier. But it was now too late. With one final, pain-wracked lunge, Mme. de Crout fell upon the evil jewel. She uttered a last, low, inhuman moan, a sound that made even the most hardened of the Fraternity's

members shudder. Then she raised the thing up, where it shone with a monstrous intensity, patching her face with golden waves upon her dead skin. Her eyes were blind, covered now with some milky film; but she needed them no longer.

She tried to stand again, but failed. Her final act was to take the gem, the instrument of her own execution, and place it in her mouth. The instant she shut her cracked, bleeding lips we were all released from the jewel's power. I choose to believe that even in the final extremity of her torture, Mme. de Crout understood what she did, and acted in our behalf.

We rushed to her side. Before we crossed the small space that separated us from her, she had swallowed the thing, choking and gagging. She threw her arms into the air, tossed her head back, and collapsed. Mr. Sparrow caught her as she fell. She was quite dead.

"THE CONSELE?" asked Monsieur Bechet.

"Of course," said Korpaniev distractedly, while he examined the box in which the jewel had been mailed.

I was nearly insane with fright. I have tried to tell you, Ernst, just how ruined my nerves had been; I had fled to New Orleans for my sanity, no matter how melodramatic such a statement may sound. I had guarded myself, insulated myself with strange scenes, unknown neighbors, a completely new existence in which the fearful contentions of the past had no part. And now, imagine how I reacted! Not a day, not twelve hours after I reluctantly welcomed back that old environment, I was again plunged into the endless terror of the eternal struggle. How I wanted to run! Oh, Ernst, let me tell you. I have

the desire and the understanding to aid them; certainly we all do, all who can intellectually despise the evils which the twisted minds among us can invent. But it is not everyone who, seeing what I have seen, feeling the filthy, nauseating sensations I've known, can stand fast and do battle. It is not everyone that has that strength. Indeed, the ranks of our defenders are small. They grow fewer every year.

"What was it?" I asked, my voice hoarse. It took all my self-control to avoid bellowing with rage and fear, to avoid ordering them all from the house, to leave me in peace once again. In the back of my mind I recognized that I was involved, whether I wished it or not. I would have to stand up under the pressures or be driven irrevocably mad.

Knowing that, admitting it, I think I found a hidden source of strength. I had passed the crisis, and the single moment of near-lunacy had healed me more surely than all the years of hiding. Never since that hour have I doubted my place in life: I must render what small services I can perform, to aid the fight of the Fraternity. But in those initial few minutes, I was still quite terrified.

"I truthfully cannot say," said Korpaniev who, perhaps because of his great international reputation, seemed to have become the spokesman. "I saw the object for only a matter of seconds, and never clearly. It looked to be merely a golden jewel of some sort, large, cut with many angular faces. That it was an instrument of terror there is no question. But of its origin, its properties, its intended purpose, I can only speculate."

"The old woman has it now," said Mr. Sparrow. "She'll take it to her grave." We were all silent for a few

moments, staring at the corpse of Mme. de Crout, which had not ceased its hideous transformations with her death. Her skin had tightened abnormally about her skeleton, withering and turning black. Deep fissures appeared in the flesh of her head and limbs, and a foul-smelling substance exuded therefrom. Her eyes protruded in a ghastly manner and her tongue lolled from her mouth, giving her a corrupted appearance, like one who had died of plague. We were lost in our separate thoughts, but at last the voice of Mr. Leslie Cobb interrupted.

"We could recover it, I suppose," he said softly. "It certainly warrants study."

"No!" I cried. "Let it go concealed into the earth. The woman has seen little justice here; let us not violate her body's sanctity any further."

"Mr. Diomede is right, I think," said Korpaniev, and that settled the matter for the moment. But it did bring up another problem: we had a rather horrible duty to perform. At this point my body was unable to continue without rest, and so Mr. Cobb and Mr. Sparrow were delegated to inform Mme. de Crout's husband of the old woman's death, while Sir Guy fetched a doctor to take care of the formalities. Korpaniev and M. Bechet kindly volunteered to stay with me.

Matters had somewhat settled down by evening. Monsieur de Crout sunk himself in a self-pitying apathy and retired to his room. We could not, of course, tell him of the true nature of his wife's death; the doctor was likewise completely mystified and, to tell the truth, somewhat frightened. He could not be duped as easily as de Crout. The doctor had naturally never before seen as horrifying a thing as the old woman's

corpse, and he could not begin to deal with it on any normal medical level. At last, in his desire to be rid of the whole affair, he signed the death certificate which stated that Mme. de Crout had expired from "an organic seizure." Her body rested on a low divan upstairs, to which it had been moved after the doctor's departure; funeral arrangements would be made in the morning by Korpaniev, who had taken over the maintenance of the household temporarily, during M. de Crout's withdrawal.

I was resting well in my apartment. It was nearly midnight, I guess; I was in bed, reading the new novel by John Steinbeck (*The Grapes of Wrath*, which everyone is talking about. I never have finished it—thanks only to events, and not at all the fault of Steinbeck!) when I heard the doorbell ring. I looked away from the book for a few seconds, trying to hear the voices from the front of the house. I recognized Mr. Sparrow's voice, as he went to the front doors. I heard them open, and then I heard Mr. Sparrow shriek, in a most peculiar and uncharacteristic tone.

I HAD SUPPOSED that the caller was Mr. Henderson Kroeger, arrived a day or so earlier than scheduled. I was wrong. I heard a tumultuous uproar growing in the parlor, and I was once more seized with a constricting fear. Should I go out, to lend my feeble aid? That would be foolish, I thought, for I could only hinder them. But to hide in my quarters was weak and unforgiveable. I jumped from the bed, stopping not even to put on robe or slippers, and ran down the carpeted hall.

The members of the Fraternity were crowded together, all shouting and gesturing furiously. I paused for

a moment, wondering what to do. Then I heard a few words that made me weak at the knees; I could do nothing but stare, and listen to that voice I had come to know so well.

It was Dr. Warm.

LET ME NOT bore you, Ernst, with the details of the scene that ensued so noisily in the parlor. Of course there was a lot of near-hysterical clammering, during which Dr. Warm maintained his coolness of bearing that often belies the depth of his emotions. Many minutes later we had all calmed ourselves enough to permit him to speak, and thus answer a portion of the countless questions we had put to him.

"It astounds me, gentlemen," he said, removing his eyepiece and regarding each of his comrades in turn. "I know that each of you has seen sights that would strike the common man dumb with terror. Yet my simple, unadorned self has set you all into such a furor where the allied might of Hell has failed!" We laughed at this, and all spoke together again, but he would not listen. Instead, he came to my side and put his great hand upon my shoulder. "If ever I could doubt that the work I have chosen is the most rewarding labor possible, seeing you again, John, and experiencing once more the full limit of your friendship must forever cancel such thoughts." I could not look up then for, completely unbidden, a stream of tears ran down each cheek.

"And it seems you've pared yourself in anticipation of my arrival, eh, John?" said Dr. Warm with one of his rare laughs. I could only gaze at my thin, wasted body and stammer, while the others joined my friend in laughter. I began to laugh, also; we did not stop until Korpanieve raised

his hand for silence.

"Still, we cannot forget what has happened here today," said the Russian. "This evening is a time for celebration, but there is work to be done on the morrow."

"Shall we discuss it now?" asked Dr. Warm. "I do not know the matter of which you speak. Perhaps it would be best not to delay."

"It is quite late," said M. Bechet. "I for one am exhausted, and I am certain that Monsieur Diomede is likewise. We have all traveled far and seen much this day. Let us retire, enjoy a good night's rest, and begin in the morning with renewed vigor." Everyone agreed that this was the best plan, and so we bid each other good night.

We went to Brennan's for breakfast the next morning. It was a leisurely meal; sometimes a breakfast at Brennan's can take two and a half hours, lasting well past lunch time. I spoke but little, spending the time observing Dr. Warm, almost fearing to acknowledge his return. He looked not a lot different than he had the last time I had seen him. He was tall and trim, still as athletic as he had always been in his youth, his black hair no grayer than it had been five years before, his beard impeccably trimmed. His manner was easy and relaxed, though his story was one of wonder and fantastic horror.

"You all know," he said, sipping the coffee which is one of Brennan's specialties, "that in my last confrontation with my twin brother a great force was unleashed. Some fearsome psychic link between myself and Canfield, a link of which we've always been aware, though little appreciated, at last grew to a level that would tolerate containment, no longer. In a devastating release of energy, it appeared that the two of us

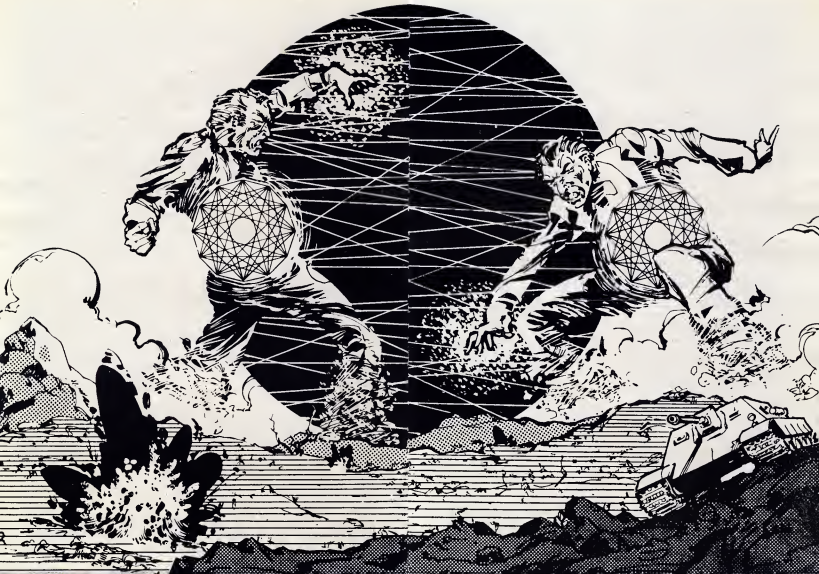
had been consumed utterly. And, in a way, we had. But rather than destroying us, that forced worked to transform us. The reason for this, I must speculate, is that both of us contributed to the pent-up energies, and thus my own component strength worked to shield me, while Canfield's monstrously evil force did the same for him."

"But Diomede and Mr. Douglas Duelle made a thorough search of the area in the days that followed," said Sir Guy. "They reported that not the least trace of either you or your brother could be found."

"Indeed," said Dr. Warm, smiling coldly. "That great cataclysm strained my Guardian miserably. The very first touch of the explosion, the first wave of force, affected my brother and me in a peculiar way. While the portion that was Canfield's attempted to destroy me entirely, my own still-potent will defended me. I was wrapped in a shield of spiritual armor. The forces released were of such a magnitude, however, that my protective envelope was bent and buffeted, even as was Canfield's. The better to defend us, the psychic shields closed in on themselves, just as a person will double up to protect his body under physical assault. The explosion went on and on, wave after wave of pure destructive force. We, in our cases, were squeezed smaller and smaller, in an effort to present a lesser area to the enemy. My Guardian maintained me within the shield, and I suppose that Canfield may well have had some similar aid, though I cannot say for certain."

"Then there's a possibility that Canfield survived as well?" asked Mr. Leslie Cobb.

DR. WARM NODDED. "I am here, and therefore there is every



reason to believe that Canfield, too, will turn up sooner or later." We all considered the implications of that fact in silence. "But, as I continue," said Dr. Warm, "you may see why it is possible that, though technically alive, Canfield may be considered effectively nullified for an indefinite period.

"At the very last, in a supreme moment of psychic struggle, I experienced a shock of incredible fury. All existence was blotted out in a great tumult of light and heat. I feared that I had been blinded by the final blast, for my eyes saw only a panorama of white, unmarred by any detail. This lasted for what seemed many days, though I cannot now be certain. It was as though I were trapped within the confines of my own brain. I slept several times, each time awakening to a startled realization of my fate.

"At last the whiteness began to darken. I was gladdened, because after the days of monotonous sameness, any change was preferable. But still I could only watch. None of those once-powerful talents which had aided me in the past helped me now. The whiteness became yellow, and then a dusky amber color. I could see again at last, but everything was tinted as though seen through amber glasses. And my viewpoint was odd: I seemed to be lying in a clump of grass. I could see it quite plainly, drops of dew sliding down the blades, insects crawling along the rich black earth. But the grass towered above me! My psychic aura had been so bashed and battered that it enclosed me now, helpless, within a golden-colored crystal smaller than a man's fist."

Immediately I realized the significance of what Dr. Warm was saying. It was incredible, to be sure,

but it appeared certain that the other golden jewel which had brought Mme. de Crout to such grief could only be the entombed essence of Dr. Warm's depraved brother, Canfield. Of course, the same thought occurred to the members of the Fraternity; they said, nothing, however, preferring to hear the remainder of Dr. Warm's tale. Therefore I, too, kept my silence. But the knowledge that, at long last, we had our eternal enemy safely imprisoned gave me a peace and a relaxation such as I had not known in years.

"I can guess that I rested thus, in that unknown field, captive within that faceted gem, for the greater part of my five-year absence," said Dr. Warm. "I needed no food nor drink, but my mind became fatigued, and I slept at regular intervals. I watched the seasons come and go, and at last I became aware of some movements at the extremity of my field of vision. A few moments later, I saw a gigantic hand reach down and scoop up my mineral cell. I had been found by some person, I knew not whom, and I could not guess at what would happen. I was placed in darkness, perhaps in a pocket, where I sat brooding for many hours.

"Finally I was brought out again into the light of day. From the images, repeated many times by the facets of my gemlike shelter, I could see that I was lying upon a counter in some sort of jewelry shop. What bits of printed words I could see were all in German. I was picked up by another hand and carried away into the back of the shop. Then began a series of painful operations, as the jeweler affixed a pin clasp onto the flat back of the amber shield. Afterward I rested, and the next day I was recovered, by the same person who found me, I suppose. The gem

was pinned to the gentleman's scarf, and there I remained for several months, in a position to observe my surroundings.

"I was, in fact, in Germany. It did not take me long to realize that my captor was an aviator in the Luftwaffe. I could only observe, for try as I might I could not release myself from my protective shell. I watched in horror; I rode along in the cockpit of a Junkers 87, the awful Stuka dive bomber that so mercilessly bombs those who would stand against the Nazi machine. On the third raid in which my captor took part, a mission against a small railhead somewhere in Poland, I decided to exert every bit of energy and psychic influence, in order to contribute in some minute way in the battle against this evil. In the early light of dawn, high over the wooded countryside east of Danzig, I saw several Russian fighters, Rata J 15s. The Stukas easily evaded them and, as my pilot turned to watch, I saw our escort Messerschmitt 109s cut down the Russian fighters in the shortest possible time. We flew on.

"I began then to concentrate my long-unused faculties. I aimed my total being at the mind of him who wore me as a badge of honor. I struggled and fought; at last, I won. The Stuka pilot slumped forward, and the plane went into a final dive. I saw the cockpit gunner trying desperately to reach the controls. It was no use. The airplane was in a steep fall from which it could not be pulled. I saw a brilliant orange and black explosion as the craft smashed headlong into the earth. I heard a small shattering sound—the amber crystal in which my spirit's essence was bound—and then I lost consciousness."

"HOW THEN were you saved?" asked Sir Guy incredulously.

"I cannot fill in more details," said Dr. Warm. "I know only that I awoke, in my corporeal self, bruised, aching, unbearably hungry, on the very plot of ground on which had stood the barn of Mr. Lucas Shoreham, where Canfield and I had waged our final battle." Dr. Warm stopped, his story completed. We were all quiet for a few seconds.

"Your history is of greater importance than even you might imagine, my friend," said Korpaniev. And then the exiled Russian briefly told Dr. Warm of the events of the previous day. Dr. Warm's expression became grimmer as he listened. When Korpaniev had finished, Dr. Warm looked around the table.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly, "we have at one time both the greatest opportunity and the most supreme danger. We must act with care and accuracy. Even as I have returned among you, so too may Canfield, bringing with him all the unspeakable atrocities which are the product of his twisted mind alone. We have been given the means to put that virulent force to rest forever. The jewel was sent among you as a messenger of doom, but if we proceed with caution we may teach the Conscience that it, too, is liable to fatal mistakes." With that, Dr. Warm called for the check and we left Brennan's, walking swiftly back to my rented apartments.

"It is my thought," said Mr. Sparrow, "that Madame de Crout attempted to swallow the jewel while she was already in quite a weakened state. Owing to the size of the thing, I have a suspicion that it may have lodged in her throat, and may therefore be easily retrievable."

"Let us hope so," I said,

shuddering in nervous anticipation.

"Nevertheless, we cannot act without the most extreme deliberation," said Dr. Warm.

We arrived at the house on D'Aubont Street. I unlocked the front doors, and all but myself and Korpaniev adjourned to the parlor. The Russian and I went upstairs, Korpaniev to check the corpse of Mme. de Crout, I to rouse her recently bereaved husband. I was still tapping on M. de Crout's door when I heard a shout from Korpaniev that brought the rest of the men running up the stairs. I hurried to the room where we had placed the old woman's body, and M. de Crout, yawning and scratching, stumbled into the hallway behind me.

"She's gone," said Korpaniev simply. There was no reason to say more; we all understood what that implied.

"And Canfield was right in our grasp!" I said, nearly weeping with frustration.

Mr. Leslie Cobb sighed loudly. "Nothing to do now but wait. It's completely up to the Conseele. Our only hope is that they don't know how to free Canfield from the jewel. I'm sure they would never crush the thing otherwise."

"Quite correct, Mr. Cobb," said Dr. Warm imperturbably. For the rest of the day we all sat silently. I was the only one who displayed any signs of anxiety. Old de Crout, seemingly already healed of his grief, spent the day in his musty shop.

That evening I sent a neighbor boy to find us dinner. About half an hour later there was a knock on the door. I opened, expecting of course to find the boy and our meal, but once more I was surprised. I discovered the smiling person of Mr. Henderson Kroeger, he whose letter first in-

formed me of Mme. de Crout's fateful plan.

"Ah, Diomedes!" he cried. "You look well. May I come in?"

"Of course, of course," I said. I showed him into the parlor. "You'll have several pleasant surprises here, I think."

"Cobb!" shouted Kroeger. "Lord, I haven't seen you in years! And Sir Guy!" He paused, noticing that they were all looking toward a darkened corner of the room. Kroeger's gaze followed theirs, to spy at last my friend, Dr. Warm. Kroeger could say nothing. His words emerged as strangled gurglings. Then Kroeger ran across the room and embraced his fellow. For many minutes thereafter there was another reiteration of Dr. Warm's story and of the events in the house.

"I've brought something," said Kroeger, at their conclusion. "It was waiting at the hotel. It's addressed to Diomedes, in care of me." He produced a small package. I looked at it suspiciously, but the members of the Fraternity did not seem to catch any warning hints of evil.

I shrugged and began removing the paper wrapping. Inside I found a lovely hourglass, made of richly stained hardwood. Inside the glass, in lieu of sand, was a fine gray powder. There was no indication of the party that sent it to me. I thought that it was quite nice, but could not understand why I had received it. Evidently someone had intended it to mean something to me. It didn't, except for the fact that its having been sent in care of Kroeger was odd in itself. I placed the hourglass on a small end table, and rejoined the lively conversation.

Some minutes passed, during which I noticed a growing feeling of unease. It began as merely a nervous

agitation, grew to a worrisome anxiety, finally to a near-panic. I could not discover any cause for these fretful symptoms. The others in the room were similarly showing increasing signs of discomfort. Then I noticed that I had turned over the hourglass, so that the supply of gray powder was trickling through the narrow waist of the glass. Some large lump had stuck about halfway down the narrowing container; the gray powder above it was blocked from falling through into the bottom part of the hourglass, but the rest of the powder was slowly funneling out, revealing the lower part of the foreign object. As I stared in growing terror, I realized that the obstruction was amber in color, flashing golden sparks of menace into the room

"TURN IT OVER again, it's the ashes of the old woman!" cried Mr. Cobb, already on his knees, clutching his throat. His eyes were beginning to bulge, even as Mme. de Crout's had.

Sir Guy's head lolled, as though the aged gentleman had lost consciousness. His skin had taken a sick, greenish hue. Monsieur Bechet had tried to crawl to the table on which the hourglass stood, but now knelt on the carpet, his hands ripping at his shirt collar. Korpaniev also tried to stagger across the room, but collapsed after but three faltering steps. Both Mr. Pitt and Mr. Kroeger sat immobile, clutching the arms of their chairs, their mouths stretched back in frightening grimaces. Mr. Sparrow twisted in pain, grabbing his abdomen and sobbing. The roaring in my head and the sharp, stabbing pains were growing stronger and more unbearable as the powdered ash slipped inexorably through the hourglass.

Only Dr. Warm seemed capable of

action. He moved slowly toward the hellish device. The amber lights flickered on his face, which was set in a determined frown. I knew that he must be suffering every bit as much as we, but the strength of his will would not let that deter him. With one painfilled stride after another, he approached the hourglass. His progress slowed as the anguish grew in him, until I thought that he could never reach it in time. Still he continued across the room, which now seemed endless in its carpeted expanse. The air was filled with our screams of suffering, as more and more of Canfield's golden jewel was revealed.

Dr. Warm fell to his knees. He was as tormented as we, but he would not give up. His arm reached out, and his flesh looked as gray and deathly as the ashes which ran, marking our destruction. His hand seemed more claw than human. He stretched further. I heard a half-suppressed whimper pass his lips, and then he had the glass. He turned it over, and the jewel of hell tumbled down, while the gray powder began to fall back on top of it, covering it slowly. Dr. Warm collapsed, unconscious and helpless.

The hourglass was still working its fatal purpose upon us, though now with the slow filtering of the ash the effects would grow less. But I saw that already all the members of the Fraternity, with their psychic senses more finely attuned to the attack, were very near death. Mr. Cobb and Sir Guy in particular were badly affected, their flesh showing large scorchs and their breathing ragged and shallow. I was the only one in the room still conscious, but I could not move. I could only watch death approach.

I heard the front doors open. "Here it is," I thought. "The represen-

tatives of the Consele have come, to watch their moment of great victory." Once again I was wrong. I saw the shuffling form of old de Crout, returning from his shop.

I tried to call out, but my voice was hoarse and cracked. He heard the sound, though surely could not understand my words. He peered into the parlor. His eyes grew large as he saw the awful sight we presented. I could only try to indicate the dreadful hourglass. I managed, after what seemed an eternity of pain, to raise one hand a few inches.

I pointed, and old de Crout saw what I indicated. He saw Dr. Warm, inert, on the floor near the table. I realized that the old man himself was beginning to feel the effects of the amber poison. He went to the table and lifted the hourglass, not stopping even to examine its contents. He raised the thing over his head.

"No," I said weakly, seeing what he was doing.

He could not hear me. He heaved the hourglass through the window and out onto D'Aubont Street.

First there was the crash of the window shattering, then a lesser racket of the hourglass itself hitting the street. Then there was a peculiar explosive sound, like a great wind, and I saw the orange glimmers of flames for only a second or two. Already I had nearly recovered as, the day before, the intense feeling of evil had passed when Mme. de Crout had swallowed the devil's gem. The other members of the Fraternity were likewise coming around, except for old Sir Guy who, we learned shortly, had perished. Just as Dr. Warm was standing, and as Korpaniev was weakly moving to the broken window, I heard the horrid, mad laughter I had prayed never again to hear. Only for an instant I heard Canfield, and

then the sound died away in the breeze.

"HE'S BEEN TRANSPORTED back to Shorham's," said Dr. Warm. "Just as I was. The Consele's gift succeeded better than even they planned." He looked up sadly. "And now that poor woman's ashes are scattered on the street."

"Let's follow your brother as soon as possible," I cried. "We can't afford to lose him now."

Korpaniev shook his head. "He won't stay there long," said the Russian. "We'd never find him. But we can be sure that he'll find us again, soon enough."

"We're right back where we were five years ago," said Dr. Warm, hitting his hand against the table. "But then, so are they. Except that we've all learned much about what we may do, and about what we *have* to do." The others nodded.

That was some eight weeks ago, Ernst. The next day, Prime Minister Konoye, the moderate voice of Japan, was replaced by General Tojo. A month later the Maryknoll talks between the United States and Japan ended in deadlock. And two weeks ago, of course, we awoke to the woeful news from Hawaii. It is no coincidence.

ERNST, unless we can find and destroy Canfield, our world is ended. You will say that one man cannot have such an influence in the world at large. You are wrong. You speak of politics, of diplomatic channels, of principles. What, then, is it that causes a nation to go insane, as your own people have done, as Japan has? And now this war which he has whipped up for his amusement will work to hide Canfield's trail. There is so much evil let loose in the world,

that tracking him must take the combined talents and resources of all the best people we can muster.

Among all this, I truly hope you

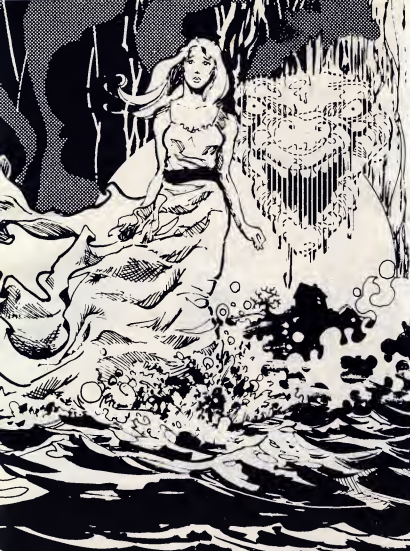
and Gretchen can find happiness. God help us all.

As always,

John

□





CONJURE WIFE

FRITZ LEIBER

Conclusion

NORMAN SAYLOR is not the sort of man to go prying into his wife's dressing room. That's partly the reason why he did it. He's sure that nothing can touch the security of the relationship between him and his wife, TANSY.

To his surprise, Norman discovers that his wife possesses all the accouterments of a modern day witch: graveyard dirt, bits of iron, envelopes filled with snips of hair, and little bags of dried leaves and powdered vegetable matters—all the paraphernalia of a conjure wife. As a sociology professor at HEMPNELL COLLEGE, Norman has made numerous studies of witchcraft and



the supernatural—and he can't believe his wife has become involved in such superstition. But, when he confronts her later that evening, she admits it's true; she tells him her magic has protected him from the backbiting and politics of the academic career—just as the magic of other wives protected **their** husbands.

Unable to accept this, Norman insists that Tansy give up her fantasies of sorcery and magic. Together, they destroy the magic pouches as their black cat, **TOTEM**, looks on. After Tansy goes to bed, Norman discovers one final packet in his vest watch—and as he destroys it, watching it being consumed in the fireplace, a chill goes up his spine . . . and he feels suddenly **vulnerable**.

Almost immediately, the phone rings and a young man threatens him with violence because Norman failed the boy in sociology; minutes later, Norman receives another hysterical phone call, from a girl who claims she's in love with him—not an unnatural occurrence in a professor's life, but something which has never happened to **Norman** before.

Gradually, over the next few days, the life which he has built up at **Hempnell** begins to collapse. The elderly **MRS. CARR**, Dean of Women and wife of a professor of the mathematic department, brings a girl to the Dean of the Men's Office, **HAROLD GUNNISON**—a girl who claims Norman seduced her. The matter is set aright, but the taint remains; Norman knows this is the same girl who phoned him, and yet he can't understand why she went so far with her fantasies. It makes no sense.

At the same time, **HERVEY SAWTELLE**, Norman's rival for the chairmanship of the Sociology

Department, discovers a paper which seems to invalidate one of Norman's original studies; **Sawtelle** practically accuses Norman of plagerism. **Sawtelle's** wife, **EVELYN**, seems to take an inordinate delight in Norman's discomfort—and though Norman explains how the paper **Sawtelle** discovered was actually a plagerism of **Norman's** work, the taint—remains.

That same day, the young man who called Norman about his grades, arrives at Norman's office with a gun and attempts to shoot him. After a brief scuffle, Norman relieves the boy of the pistol and has him taken away by his parents; **Gunnison** helps smooth things over, and he and Norman sit in **Saylor's** office for several minutes, untensing. **Gunnison** notices the large gargoyle perched on the build opposite Norman's office window, and comments on how his wife, **HULDA**, an amateur photography buff, has taken dozens of pictures of the statue. "**Hempnell's** her speciality," **Gunnison** explains. "But that one's her favorite. Usually it's the husband who keeps ducking down to the darkroom, but not in our family—and me a chemist, at that."

Norman glances at the gargoyle, and notices that the statue seems to have moved since he last looked out the window. He remembers **Gaileo's** supposed muttering after the **Inquisition** had forced the astronomer to recant his belief that the earth revolves about the sun: "**Eppur si muove.**" "It still moves." Norman is certain the movement is only a trick of his eyes.

A few days later Tansy and Norman host a card party for the **CARRS**, the **GUNNISONS**, and the **SAWTELLES**. During the party, Norman catches oblique comments by the women directed at his wife's

health; he begins to wonder if they're referring to the health of her spells—spells which no longer exist. He dismisses the thought as absurd, but still the idea persists. Throughout the card game, Norman finds himself imagining the women as "primitives"—something he does during attacks of boredom, trying to picture people as they would look in a primitive society. The image he receives of Evelyn, Hulda and Mrs. Carr are of three witches clustered around the totems of their magic. He dismisses the thought nervously; he realizes he's letting himself be carried away.

During a break in the game, Norman goes to the kitchen and meets Hulda, Gunnison coming out of the bedroom; Mrs. Gunnison seems to be slipping something into her purse, but Norman makes no comment on it. The evening proceeds to its conclusion; the couples leave—the women clustering about Tansy a moment before they part—and Norman remains uneasy. Tansy, he notices, has taken the entire change in lifestyle remarkably well; apparently she noticed none of the oddities he has noticed—and he hasn't told her about the events of the past few days.

The next day the gargoyle seems to have moved a bit more.

Things continue to go badly for Norman; to his dismay he loses the chairmanship of the Sociology Department to Hervey Sawtelle—lost it because of an outburst during one of his classes, a fit of anger he couldn't seem to control.

He wonders if his behavior, and the things which have happened to him in the past several days, are connected with Tansy's magic. Or the lack of it. Returning angrily to his home, he feels something moving in the darkness behind him. He glances

and out of the corner of his eye "sees" a large gray shape, like a lizard made of stone. Then the shape is gone. Nervous, Norman returns home.

That evening, something attacks the house, killing Totem, the Saylor's cat. As a storm builds around the split-level home, Norman catches glimpses of something large and animalistic scruffling on the lawn outside. Thunder and lightning rip open the sky around the house, flashes of blue illuminating something gray and winged on the porch. Norman turns to his wife, and discovers her toying with a bit of string—forming knots seemingly at random, but which he suddenly recognizes as conjure knots like the kind used by Indians to control the wind—and lightning. Tansy seems distracted, but her questions of Norman pinpoint what has been bothering him. Norman realizes that she **knows**; that his fear of witchcraft applied against him may in fact be true. And then Tansy's knots tighten, become a snare—

One final lightning burst, the crackle of electricity on stone; and then silence.

Outside, Norman sees the stone gargoyle from the building opposite his window. The gargoyle is motionless, planted on the Saylor's lawn. Norman laughs, and tried to tell Tansy it's a prank by the college fraternity. Almost, he believes it himself.

"And of all the mad coincidences," Norman says, "the lightning had to go and strike it." He touches the stone surface of the gargoyle, but at the feel of the rough, unyielding surface, Norman's laughter dies.

"*Eppur si muove*," he murmurs to himself, so low that even Tansy, standing next to him, might not hear. "*Eppur si muove*."

CHAPTER X

NEXT DAY the appearance Norman presented to Hempnell was a close approximation of that of a soldier suffering from battle-fatigue. He had had a long and heavy sleep, but he looked as if he were stupefied by weariness and nervous strain. And he was. Even Harold Gunnison remarked on it.

"It's nothing," Norman replied. "I'm just lazy."

Gunnison smiled skeptically. "You've been working too hard. It butchers efficiency. Better ration your hours of work. Your jobs won't go hungry if you feed them eight hours a day."

"Trustees are queer cusses," he continued with apparent irrelevance. "And in some ways Pollard is more of a politician than an educator. But he brings in the money, and that's what college president's are for."

Norman was grateful for Gunnison's tactful commiseration on his loss of the sociology chairmanship, especially since he knew it cost Harold an effort to criticize Pollard in any way. But he felt as far removed from Gunnison as from the hordes of gaily dressed students who filled the walks and socialized in clusters. As if there were a wall of faintly clouded glass between him and them. His only aim—and even that was blurred—was to prolong his present state of fatigued reaction from last night's events and to avoid all thoughts.

Thoughts are dangerous, he told himself, and thoughts against all science, all sanity, all civilized intelligence, are the most dangerous of all. He felt their presence here and there in his brain, like pockets of poison, harmless as long as you left them encysted and did not prick

them.

One was more familiar than the others. It had been there last night at the height of the storm. He felt vaguely thankful that he could no longer see inside of it.

Another thought-cyst was concerned with Tansy, and why she had seemed so cheerful and forgetful this morning.

Another—a very large one—was sunk so deeply in his mind that he could only perceive a small section of its globular surface. He knew it was connected with an unfamiliar, angry, destructive emotion that he had yesterday sensed in himself more than once, and he knew that it must under no circumstances be disturbed. He could feel it pulsate slowly and rhythmically, like a monster asleep in mud.

Another had to do with hands—hands in flannel gloves.

Another—tiny but prominent—was somehow concerned with cards.

And there were more, many more.

His situation was akin to that of the legendary hero who must travel though a long and narrow corridor, without once touching the morbidly enticing, poisoned walls.

He knew he could not avoid contact with the thought-cysts indefinitely, but in the meantime they might shrink and disappear.

The day fitted his superficially dull and lethargic mood. Instead of the cool spell that should have followed the storm, there was a foretaste of summer in the air. Student absences rose sharply. Those who came to class were inattentive and exhibited other symptoms of spring fever.

Only Bronstein seemed animated. He kept drawing Norman's other students aside by twos and threes, and whispering to them animatedly, heatedly. Norman found out that he

was trying to get up a petition of protest on Sawtelle's appointment. Norman asked him to stop it. Bronstein refused, but in any case he seemed to be failing in the job of arousing the other students.

Norman's lectures were languid. He contented himself with transforming his notes into accurate verbal statements with a minimum of mental effort. He watched the pencils move methodically as notes were taken, or wander off into intricate doodles. Two girls were engrossed in sketching the handsome profile of the fraternity president in the second row. He watched foreheads wrinkle as they picked up the thread of his lecture, smooth out again as they dropped it.

And all the while his own mind was wandering off on side tracks too dreamlike and irrational to be called thoughts. They consisted of mere trails of words, like a psychologist's association test.

One such trail began when he recalled the epigram about a lecture being a process of transferring the contents of the teacher's notebook into the notebooks of the students, without allowing it to pass through the minds of either. That made him think of mimeographing.

Mimeograph, it went on. Margaret Van Nice. Theodore Jennings. Gun. Windowpane. Galileo. Scroll—(sheer away from that! Forbidden territory.)

The daydream backtracked and took a different turning. Jennings. Gunnison. Pollard. President. Emperor. Empress. Juggler. Tower. Hanged Man—(hold on! don't go any further).

As the long dull day wore on, the daydreams gradually assumed a uniform coloration.

Gun. Knife. Silver. Broken glass. Nail. Tetanus.

After his last class he retreated to his office and moped and fussed around on little jobs, so preoccupied that at times he forgot what he was doing. The daydreams still wouldn't let him alone.

War. Mangled bodies. Mayhem. Murder. Rope. Hangman. (Sheer off again!) Gas. Gun. Poison.

The coloration of blood and physical injury.

And ever more strongly he felt the slow-pulsing respiration of the monster in the depths of his mind, dreaming nightmares of carnage from which it would soon awaken and heave up out of the mud. And he powerless to stop it. It was as if a crusted-over swamp, swollen with underground water, were pushing up the seemingly healthy ground by imperceptible degrees—nearing the point when it would burst through in one vast slimy eruption.

Starting home, Norman fell in with Mr. Carr.

"Good evening, Norman," said the old gentleman, lifting his Panama hat to mop his forehead, which merged into an extensive bald area.

"Good evening, Linthicum," said Norman. But his mind was occupied with speculating how, if a man let a thumbnail grow and then sharpened it carefully, he could cut the veins of his wrist and so bleed to death.

Mr. Carr wiped the handkerchief under his beard.

"I enjoyed the bridge thoroughly," he said. "Perhaps the four of us could have a game when the ladies are away at the faculty wives' meeting next Thursday? You and I could be partners and use the Culbertson slam conventions." His voice became wistful. "I'm tired of always having to play the Blackwood."

NORMAN NODDED, but he was

thinking of how men have learned to swallow their tongues, when the occasion came, and die of suffocation. He tried to check himself. These were speculations appropriate only to the concentration camp. Visions of death kept rising in his mind, replacing one another. He felt the pulsations of the thing below his thoughts become almost unendurably strong. Mr. Carr nodded pleasantly and turned off. Norman quickened his pace, as if the walls of the poisoned passageway were contracting on the legendary hero and, unless the end were soon reached, he would have to shove out against them wildly.

From the corner of his eye he saw one of his students. She was staring puzzledly, at him, or at something behind him. He brushed past her.

He reached the boulevard. The lights were against him. He paused on the curb. A large red truck was rumbling toward the intersection at a fair rate of speed.

And then he knew just what was going to happen, and that he would be unable to stop himself.

He was going to wait until the truck was very close and then he was going to throw himself under the wheels. End of the passageway.

That was the meaning of the fifth stick figure, the tarot diagram that had departed from tradition.

Empress—Juggler—The truck was very close. Tower—The light had started to change but the truck was not going to stop. Hanged man—

It was only when he leaned forward, tensing his leg muscles, that the small flat voice spoke into his ear, a voice that was a monotone and yet diabolically humorous, the voice of his dreams:

"Not for two weeks, at least. Not for two more weeks."

He regained his balance. The truck

thundered by. He looked over his shoulder—first up, then around. No one but a small Negro boy and an elderly man, rather shabbily dressed, carrying a shopping bag. Neither of them near him. A shiver settled on his spine.

Hallucinations, of course, he told himself. That voice had been inside his head. Nevertheless his eyes shifted warily from side to side, probing the very air for hints of the unseen, as he crossed the street and proceeded home. As soon as he was inside, he poured himself a more than generous drink. Oddly, Tansy had set out soda and whiskey on the sideboard. He mixed the highball and gulped it down. Mixed himself another, took a gulp, then looked at the glass doubtfully.

Just then he heard a car stop and a moment later Tansy came in, carrying a bundle. Her face was smiling and a little flushed. With a sigh of relief she set down the bundle and pushed aside the dark bangs from her forehead.

"Whew! What a muggy day. I thought you'd be wanting a drink. Here, let me finish that one for you."

When she put down the glass there was only ice in it. "There, now we're blood brothers or something. Mix yourself another."

"That was my second," he told her.

"Oh, heck, I thought I was cheating you." She sat on the edge of the table and wagged a finger in his face. "Look, mister, you need a rest. Or some excitement. I'm not sure which. Maybe both. Now here's my plan. I make us a cold supper—sandwiches. Then, when it's dark we get in Oscar and drive to the Hill. We haven't done that for years. How about it, mister?"

He hesitated. Helped by the drink, his thoughts were veering. Half his

mind was still agonizing over the hallucination he'd just experienced, with its unnerving suggestion of unsuspected suicidal impulses and . . . he wasn't sure what. The other half was coming under the spell of Tansy's gaiety.

She reached out and pinched his nose. "How about it?"

"All right," he said.

"Hey, you're supposed to act interested!" She slid off the table, started for the kitchen, then added darkly over her shoulder, "But that will come later."

She looked provocatively pretty. He couldn't see any difference between now and fifteen years ago. He felt he was seeing her for the hundredth first time.

Feeling halfway relaxed at last, or at least diverted, he sat down in the easy chair. But as he did, he felt something hard and angular indent his thigh. He stood up quickly, stuck his hand in his trousers pocket, and drew out Theodore Jennings' revolver.

He stared at it frightenedly, unable to recall when he had taken it from the drawer at the office. Then, with a quick glance toward the kitchen, he hurried over to the sideboard, opened the bottom drawer, stuffed it under a pile of linen.

When the sandwiches came, he was reading the evening paper. He had just found a local-interest item at the bottom of the fifth page.

A practical joke is worth any amount of trouble and physical exertion. At least, that is the sentiment of a group of Hempnell College students, as yet unidentified. But we are wondering about the sentiments of Professor Norman Saylor,

when he looked out the window this morning and saw a stone gargoyle weighing a good three hundred pounds sitting in the middle of his lawn. It had been removed from the roof of one of the college buildings. How the students managed to detach it, lower it from the roof, and transport it to Professor Saylor's residence, is still a mystery.

When President Randolph Pollard was asked about the pranksters, he laughingly replied, "I guess our physical education program must be providing our men with exceptional reserves of strength and energy."

When we spoke to President Pollard he was leaving to address the Lions' Club on "The Greater Hempnell: College and Town." (For details of his address, see Page 1.)

JUST WHAT you might expect. The usual inaccuracies. It wasn't a gargoyle; gargoyles are ornamental rainspouts. And then no mention at all of the lightning. Probably the reporter had suppressed it because it didn't fit into any of the conventional patterns for supposedly unconventional news stories. Newspapers were supposed to love coincidences, but God, the weird ones they missed!

Finally, the familiar touch of turning the item into an advertisement for the physical-education department. You had to admit that the Hempnell publicity office had a kind of heavy-handed efficiency.

Tansy swept the paper out of his hands.

"The world can wait," she said. "Here, have a bite of my sandwich."

CHAPTER XI

IT WAS quite dark when they started for the Hill. Norman drove carefully, taking his time at intersections. Tansy's gaiety still did no more than hold in check the other half of his thoughts.

She was smiling mysteriously. She had changed to a white sports dress. She looked like one of his students.

"I might be a witch," she said, "taking you to a hilltop rendezvous. Our own private Sabbat."

Norman started. Then he quickly reminded himself that when she said things like that, she was making a courageous mockery of her previous behavior. He must on no account let her see the other half of his thoughts.

It would never do to let her realize how badly worried he was about himself.

The lights of the town dropped behind. Half a mile out, he turned off sharply onto the road that wound up the Hill. It was bumpier than he remembered from the last time—was it as much as ten years ago? And the trees were thicker, their twigs brushing the windshield.

When they emerged into the half acre of clearing on the top, the red moon, two days after full, was rising.

Tansy pointed to it and said, "Check! I timed it perfectly. But where are the others? They always used to be two or three cars up here. And on a night like this!"

He stopped the car close to the edge. "Fashions in lovers' lanes change like anything else," he told her. "We're traveling a disused forkway."

"Always the sociologist!"

"I guess so. Maybe Mrs. Carr

found out about this place. And I suppose the students range farther afield nowadays."

She rested her head on his shoulder. He switched off the headlights, and the moon cast soft shadows.

"We used to do this at Gorham," Tansy murmured. "When I was taking your classes, and you were the serious young instructor. Until I found out you weren't any different from the college boys—only better. Remember?"

He nodded and took her hand. He looked down at the town, made out the campus, with its prominent floodlights designed to chase couples out of dark corners. Those garishly floodlighted Gothic buildings seemed for the moment to symbolize a whole world of barren intellectual competition and jealous traditionalism, a world which at the moment he felt to be infinitely alien.

"I wonder if this is why they hate us so?" he asked, almost without thinking.

"Whatever are you talking about?" But the question sounded lazy.

"I mean the rest of the faculty, or most of them. Is it because we can do things like this?"

She laughed. "So you're actually coming alive. We don't do things like this so very often, you know."

He kept on with his idea. "It's a devilishly competitive and jealous world. And competition in an institution can be nastier than any other kind, because it's so confined. Think so?"

"I've lived with it for years," said Tansy simply.

"Of course, it's all very petty. But petty feelings can come to outweigh big ones. Their size is better suited to the human mind."

He looked down at Hempnell and

tried to visualize the amount of ill will and jealousy he had inevitably accumulated for himself. He felt a slight chill creeping on his skin. He realized where this train of thought was leading. The darker half of his mind loomed up.

"Here, philosopher," said Tansy, "have a slug."

She was offering him a small silver flask.

He recognized it. "I never dreamed you'd kept it all these years."

"Uh-huh. Remember when I first offered you a drink from it? You were a trifle shocked, I believe."

"I took the drink."

"Uh-huh. So take this one."

It tasted like fire and spice. There were memories in it, too, memories of those crazy prohibition years, and of Gorham and New England.

"Brandy?"

"Greek. Give me some."

The memories flooded over the darker half of his mind. It disappeared beneath their waves. He looked at Tansy's sleek hair and moon-glowing eyes. Of course she's a witch, he thought lightly. She's Lilith. Ishtar. He'd tell her so.

"Do you remember the time," he said, "we slid down the bank to get away from the night watchman at Gorham? There would have been a magnificent scandal if he'd caught us."

"Oh, yes, and the time—"

When they went down the hill, the moon was an hour higher. He drove slowly. No need to imitate the sillier practices of the prohibition era. A truck chugged past him. "Two more weeks." Rot! Who'd he think he was, hearing voices? Joan of Arc?

He felt hilarious. He wanted to tell Tansy all the ridiculous things he'd been imagining the last few days, so she could laugh at them, too. It would

make a swell ghost story. There was a reason he shouldn't tell her, but now it seemed an insignificant reason—part and parcel of this cramped, warped, overcautious Hempnell life they ought to break away from more often. What was life worth, anyway, if you had to sit around remembering not to mention this, that, and the other thing because someone else might be upset?

So when they arrived in the living room and Tansy flopped down on the sofa, he began, "You know, Tansy, about this witch stuff. I want to tell you—"

He was caught completely off guard by whatever force, real or unreal, hit him. A moment later he was sitting in the easy chair, completely sober, with the outer world an icy pressure on his senses, the inner world a whirling sphere of alien thought, and the future a dark corridor two weeks long.

It was as if a very large, horny hand had been clapped roughly over his mouth, and as if another such hand had grasped him by the shoulder, shaken him, and slammed him down in the leather chair.

As if?

HE LOOKED AROUND UNEASILY.

Maybe there had been hands.

Apparently Tansy had not noticed anything. Her face was a white oval in the gloom. She was still humming a snatch of song. She did not ask what he had started to say.

He got up, walked unsteadily into the dining room, and poured himself a drink from the sideboard. On the way he switched on the lights.

So he couldn't tell Tansy or anyone else about it, even if he wanted to? That was why you never heard from

real witchcraft victims, he told himself, his thoughts for the moment quite out of hand. And why they never seemed able to escape, even if the means of escape were at hand. It wasn't weak will. They were *watched*. Like a gangster taken on a ride from an expensive night-club. He must excuse himself from the loud-mouthed crowd at his table and laugh heartily, and stop to chat with friends and throw a wink at the pretty girls, because right behind him are those white-scarfed trigger boys, hands in the pockets of their velvet-collared dress overcoats. No use dying now. Better play along. There might be a chance.

But that was thriller stuff, movie stuff.

So were the horny hands.

He nodded at himself in the glass above the sideboard.

"Meet Professor Saylor," he said, "the distinguished ethnologist and firm believer in real witchcraft."

But the face in the glass did not look so much disgusted as frightened.

He mixed himself another drink, and one for Tansy, and took them into the living room.

"Here's to wickedness," said Tansy. Do you realize that you haven't been anywhere near drunk since Christmas?"

He grinned. Getting drunk was just what the movie gangster would do, to grab a moment of forgetfulness when the Big Boy had put him on the spot. And not a bad idea.

Slowly, and at first only in a melancholy minor key, the mood of the Hill returned. They talked, played old records, told jokes that were old enough to be young again. Tansy hammered at the piano and they sang a crazy assortment of songs, folk songs, hymns, national anthems, workers' and revolutionists'

songs, blues, Brahms, Schubert—haltingly at first, later at the top of their voices.

They remembered.

And they kept on drinking.

But always, like a shimmering sphere of crystals, the alien thoughts spun in Norman's mind. The drink made it possible for him to regard them dispassionately, without constant revulsions in the name of common sense. With the singlemindedness of inebriation, his scholar's mind began to assemble world-wide evidence of witchcraft.

For instance, was it not likely that all self-destructive impulses were the result of witchcraft? Those universal impulses that were a direct contradiction to the laws of self-preservation and survival. To account for them, Poe had fancifully conceived an "Imp of the Perverse," and psychoanalysts had laboriously hypothesized a "death wish." How much simpler to attribute them to malign forces outside the individual, working by means as yet unanalyzed and therefore classified as supernatural.

His experiences during the past days could be divided into two categories. The first included those natural misfortunes and antagonisms from which Tansy's magic had screened him. The attack on his life by Theodore Jennings should probably be placed in this category. The chances were that Jennings was actually psychopathic. He would have made his murderous attack at an earlier date, had not Tansy's magic kept it from getting started. As soon as her protective screen was down, as soon as Norman burned the last hand, the idea had suddenly burgeoned in Jennings' mind like a hothouse flower. Jennings had himself admitted it. "I didn't realize

it until this minute—"

Margaret Van Nice's accusation. Thompson's sudden burst of interest in his extracurricular activities, and Sawtelle's chance discovery of the Cunningham thesis probably belonged in the same category.

In the second category—active and malign witchcraft, directed against himself.

"A penny for your thoughts," offered Tansy, looking over the rim of her glass.

"I was thinking of the party last Christmas," he replied smoothly, though in a somewhat blurred voice, "and of how Welby crawled around playing a St. Bernard, with the bearskin rug over his shoulders and the bottle of whiskey slung under his neck. And I was wondering why the best fun always seems so trite afterward. But I'd rather be trite than respectable." He felt a childish pride in his cunning at having avoided being trapped into admission. He simultaneously thought of Tansy as a genuine witch and as a potentially neurotic individual who had to be protected at all costs from dangerous suggestions. The liquor made his mind work by parts, and the parts had no check on each other.

THINGS BEGAN to happen by fits and starts. His consciousness began to black out, though in the intervals between, his thoughts went on with an exaggerated scholarly solemnity.

They were wailing "St. James Infirmary."

He was thinking: "Why shouldn't the women be the witches? They're the intuitionists, the traditionalists, the irrationalists. They're superstitious to start with. And like Tansy, most of them are probably never quite sure whether or not their

witchcraft really works."

They had shoved back the carpet and were dancing to "Chloe" Sometime or other Tansy had changed to her rose dressing gown.

He was thinking: "In the second category, put the Estrey dragon. Animated by a human or nonhuman soul conjured into it by Mrs. Gunnison and controlled through photographs. Put also the obsidian knife, the obedient wind, and the obdurate truck."

They were playing a record of Ravel's "Bolero," and he was beating out the rhythm with his fist.

He was thinking: "Business men buy stocks on the advice of fortunetellers, numerologists rule the careers of movie stars, half the world governs its actions by astrology, advertisements bleat constantly of magic and miracles, and most modern and all surrealist art is nothing but attempted witchcraft, borrowing its forms from the primitive witchdoctor and its ideas from the modern theosophist."

He was watching Tansy as she sang "St. Louis Blues" in a hoarsely throbbing voice. It was true, just as Welby had always maintained, that she had a genuine theatrical flair. Make a good chanteuse.

He was thinking: "Tansy stopped the Estrey dragon with the knots. But she'll have a bard time doing anything like that again because Mrs. Gunnison has her book of formulas and can figure out ways to circumvent her."

They were sharing a highball that would have burned his throat if his throat had not been numb, and he seemed to be getting most of it.

He was thinking: "The stick figure of the man and the truck is the key to a group of related sorceries. Cards began as instruments of magic, like

art. These sorceries aim at finishing me off. The bull-roarer acts as an amplifier. The invisible thing standing behind me, with the flat voice and heavy hands, is a guardian, to see to it that I do not deviate from the path appointed. Narrow corridor. Two weeks more."

The strange thing was that these thoughts were not altogether unpleasant. They had a wild, black, poisonous beauty of their own, a lovely, deadly shimmer. They possessed the fascination of the impossible, the incredible. They hinted at unimaginable vistas. Even while they terrorized, they did not lose that chillingly poignant beauty. They were like the visions conjured up by some forbidden drug. They had the lure of an unknown sin and an ultimate blasphemy. Norman could understand the force that compelled the practitioners of black magic to take any risk.

His drunkenness made him feel safe. It had broken his mind down into its ultimate particles, and those particles were incapable of fear because they could not be injured. Just as the atoms in a man are not slain by the bullet that slays him.

But now the particles were whirling crazily. Consciousness was wavering.

He and Tansy were in each other's arms.

Tansy was asking eagerly, coaxingly, "All that's mine is yours? All that's yours is mine?"

The question awakened a suspicion in his mind, but he could not grasp it clearly. Something made him think that the words held a trap. But what trap? His thoughts stumbled.

She was saying—it sounded like the Bible—"And I have drunk from your cup and you have drunk from mine—"

Her face was a blurred oval, her

eyes like misty jewels.

"Everything you have is mine? You give it to me without hindrance and of your own free choice?"

Somewhere a trap.

But the voice was irresistibly coaxing, like caressing fingers.

"All you have is mine? Just say it once, Norm, just once. For me."

Of course he loved her. Better than anything in the world. He drew the blurred face toward him, tried to kiss the misty eyes.

"Yes . . . yes . . . everything—" he heard himself saying.

And then his mind toppled and plunged down into a fathomless ocean of darkness and silence and peace.

CHAPTER XII

SUNLIGHT MADE a bright, creamy design on the drawn blind. Filtered sunlight filled the bedroom, like a coolly glowing liquid. The birds were chirruping importantly. Norman closed his eyes again and stretched luxuriously.

Let's see, it was about time he got started on that article for *The American Anthropologist*. And there was still some work to do on the revision of his *Textbook of Ethnology*. Lots of time, but better get it out of the way. And he ought to have a serious talk with Bronstein about his thesis. That boy had some good ideas, but he needed a balance wheel. And then his address to the Off-campus Mothers. Might as well tell them something useful . . .

Eyes still closed, he enjoyed that most pleasant of all sensations—the tug of work a man likes to do and is able to do well, yet that needn't be done immediately.

For today was certainly too good a day for golf to miss. Might see what

Gunnison was doing. And then he and Tansy had not made an expedition into the country this whole spring. He'd talk to her about it, at breakfast. Saturday breakfast was an event. She must be getting it ready now. He felt as if a shower would make him very hungry. Must be late.

He opened one eye and focused on the bedroom clock. Twelve thirty-five? Say, just when had he got to bed last night? What had he been doing?

Memory of the past few days uncoiled like a spring, so swiftly that it started his heart pounding. Yet there was a difference now in his memories. From the very first moment they all seemed incredible and unreal. He had the sensation of reading the very detailed case-history of another person, a person with a lot of odd ideas about witchcraft, suicide, persecution, and what not else. His memories could not be made to fit with his present sense of well-being. What was stranger, they did not seriously disturb that sense of well-being.

He searched his mind diligently for traces of super-natural fear, of the sense of being watched and guarded, of that monstrous self-destructive impulse. He could not discover or even suggest to himself the slightest degree of such emotions. Whatever they had been, they were now part of the past, beyond the reach of everything except intellectual memory. "Spheres of alien thought!" Why, the very notion was bizarre. And yet somehow it had all happened. *Something* had happened.

His movements had automatically taken him under the shower. And now, as he soaped himself and the warm water cascaded down, he wondered if he ought not to talk it over with Holstrom of psychology or a good practicing psychiatrist. The

mental contortions he'd gone through in the past few days would provide material for a whole treatise! But feeling as sound as he did this morning, it was impossible for him to entertain any ideas of serious mental derangement. No, what had happened was just one of those queer, inexplicable spasms of irrationality that can seize the sanest people, perhaps because they *are* so sane—a kind of discharge of long-inhibited morbidity. Too bad, though, that he had bothered Tansy with it, even thought it was her own little witchcraft complex, now happily conquered, that had touched it off. Poor kid, she had been working hard to cheer him up last night. It ought to have been the other way around. Well, he would make it up to her.

He shaved leisurely and with enjoyment. The razor behaved perfectly.

As he finished dressing, a doubt struck him. Again he searched his mind, closing his eyes like a man listening for an almost inaudible sound.

Nothing. Not the faintest trace of any morbid fears.

He was whistling as he pushed into the kitchen.

There was no sign of breakfast. Beside the sink were some unwashed glasses, empty bottles, and an ice tray filled with tepid water.

"Tansy!" he called. "Tansy!"

He walked through the house, with the vague apprehension that she might have passed out before getting to bed. They'd been drinking like fish. He went out to the garage and made sure that the car was still there. Maybe she'd walked to the grocer's to get something for breakfast. But he began to hurry as he went back into the house.

This time when he looked in the

study he noticed the upset ink bottle, and the scrap of paper just beside it on the edge of the drying black pool. The message had come within an inch of being engulfed.

It was a hurried scrawl—twice the pen point had gouged through the paper—and it broke off in the middle of a sentence, but it was undeniably in Tansy's handwriting.

For a moment it isn't watching me. I didn't realize it would be too strong for me. Not two weeks—two days! Don't try to follow me. Only chance is to do exactly what I tell you. Take four four-inch white—

His eyes traced the smear going out from the black pool and ending in the indistinct print of a hand, and involuntarily his imagination created a scene. Tansy had been scribbling desperately, stealing quick glances over her shoulder. Then *it* had awakened to what she was doing and roughly struck the pen out of her hand, and shaken her. He recalled the trip of those huge horny hands, and winced. And then . . . then she had got together her things, very quietly although there was little chance of him awakening, and she walked out of the house and down the street. And if she met anyone she knew, she had talked to them gayly, and laughed, because *it* was behind her, waiting for any false move, any attempt at escape.

So she had gone.

He wanted to run out into the street and shout her name.

But the pool of ink had dried to glistening black flakes all around the margin. It must have been spilled hours ago.

Where had she gone, in the night?

Anywhere. Wherever the narrow corridor ended for her, no longer two

weeks but only two days long.

In a flash of insight he understood why. If he hadn't been drunk last night, he would have guessed.

One of the oldest and best-established types of conjuration in the world. Transference of evils. Like the medicine man who conjures sickness into a stone, or into an enemy, or into himself—because he is better able to combat it—she had taken his curse upon herself. Shared his drink last night, shared his food. Used a thousand devices to bring them together. It was all so obvious! He racked his brain to recover those last words she had said. "Everything you have is mine? All you have is mine?"

She had meant the doom that had been laid on him.

And he had said, "Yes."

WAIT A MINUTE! What the devil was he letting himself think? He raised his eyes to the shelves of soberly bound books. Why, here he was giving way to the same sort of rot he'd been weakly toying with the past few days—now when something serious was at stake. No, no, there was nothing supernatural in this—no *it*, no guardian except a figment of his and her neurotic nerves. What *had* happened was that he had *suggested* all this nonsense to her. He had forced upon her the products of his own morbid imagination. Undoubtedly he had babbled nonsense to her while he was drunk. All his childish fancies. And it had worked on her suggestible nature—she already believing in witchcraft—until she had got the idea of transferring his doom to herself, and had convinced herself that the transference had actually occurred. And then gone off, God knows where.

And that was bad enough.

He found himself looking again at the scrawled message. He automatically asked himself, "Now what the devil are 'four-inch whites'?"

There was a light chime from the front door. He extracted a letter from the mailbox, ripped it open. It was addressed with a soft pencil and the graphite had smeared. But he knew the handwriting.

The message was so jerky and uneven that he was some time reading it. It began and ended in the middle of a sentence.

cords—and a length of gut, a bit of platinum or iridium, a piece of lodestone, a phonograph needle that has only played Scriabin's "Ninth Sonata." Then tie—

"Cords." Of course!

That was all. A continuation of the first message, with its bizarre formula. Had she really convinced herself that there was a guardian watching her, and that she could only communicate during the infrequent moments when she imagined its attention was elsewhere? He knew the answer. When you had an obsession you could convince yourself of anything.

He looked at the postmark. He recognized the name of a town several miles east of Hempnell. He could not think of a soul they knew there, or anything else about the town. His first impulse was to get out the car and rush over. But what could he do when he got there?

He looked again. The phone was ringing. It was Evelyn Sawtelle.

"Is that you, Norman? Please ask Tansy to come to the phone. I wish to speak to her."

"I'm sorry, but she isn't in."

Evelyn Sawtelle did not sound surprised at the answer—her second

question came too quickly. "Where is she then? I must get in touch with her."

He thought. "She's out in the country," he said, "visiting some friends of ours. Is there something I can tell her?"

"No, I wish to speak to Tansy. What is your friend's number?"

"They don't have a phone!" he said angrily.

"No? Well, it's nothing of importance." She sounded oddly pleased, as if his anger had given her satisfaction. "I'll call again. I must hurry now. Hervey is so busy with his new responsibilities. Good-by."

He replaced the phone. Now, why the devil—Suddenly an explanation occurred to him. Perhaps Tansy had been seen leaving town, and Evelyn Sawtelle had scented the possibility of some sort of scandal and had wanted to check. Perhaps Tansy had been carrying a suitcase.

He looked in Tansy's dressing room. The small suitcase was gone. Drawers were open. It looked as if she had packed in a hurry. But what about money? He examined his billfold. It was empty. Forty-odd dollars missing.

You could go a long way on forty dollars. The jerky illegibility of the message suggested that it had been written on a train or bus.

The next few hours very very miserable ones for Norman. He checked schedules and found that several busses and trains passed through the town from which Tansy's letter had been sent. He drove to the stations and made guarded inquiries, with no success.

He wanted to do all the things you should do when someone disappears, but he held back. What could he say? "My wife, sir, has disappeared. She is suffering from the delusion that—"

And what if she should be found and questioned in her present state of mind, examined by a doctor, before he could get to her?

No, this was something for him to handle alone. But if he did not soon get a clue to where she had gone, he would have no choice. He would have to go to the police, inventing some story to cover the facts.

She had written, "Two days." If she believed that she were doomed to die in two days, might not the belief be enough?

Toward evening he drove back to the house, repressing the chimerical hope that she had returned in his absence. The special-delivery man was just getting into his car. Norman pulled up alongside.

"Anything for Saylor?"

"Yes, sir. It's in the box."

The message was longer this time, but just as difficult to read.

At last its attention is somewhere else. If I control my emotions, it isn't so quick to notice my thoughts. But it was hard for me to post the last letter. Norman, you must do what I tell you. The two days end Sunday midnight. Then the Bay. You must follow all directions. Tie the four cords into a granny, a reef, a cat's-paw, and a carrick bend. Tie the gut in a bowline. Then add—

HE LOOKED at the postmark. The place was two hundred miles east. Not on the railroad lines, as far as he could recall. That should narrow down the possibilities considerably.

One word from the letter was repeating itself in his mind, like a musical note struck again and again until it becomes unendurable.

Bay. Bay. Bay. Bay.

The memory came of a hot after-

noon years ago. It was just before they were married. They were sitting on the edge of a ramshackle little pier. He remembered the salty, fishy smell and the splintery, gray old planks.

"Funny," she had said, looking into the green water, "but I always used to think that I'd end up down there. Not that I'm afraid of it. I've always swum way out. But even when I was a little girl I'd look at the Bay—maybe green, maybe blue, maybe gray, covered with whitecaps, glittering with moonbeams or shrouded by fog—and I'd think, 'Tansy, the Bay is going to get you, but not for years and years.' Funny, isn't it?"

And he had laughed and put his arms around her tight, and the green water had gone on lapping at the piles troused with seaweed.

He had been visiting with her family, when her father was still alive, at their home near Bayport on the southern shore of New York Bay.

The narrow corridor ended for her in the Bay, tomorrow night, midnight.

She must be headed for the Bay.

He made several calls—first bus lines, then railroad and air. It was impossible to get a reservation on the airlines, but tonight's train would get him into Jersey City an hour ahead of the bus she must be traveling on, according to the deductions he made from the place and time of the postmarks.

He knew he had ample time to pack a few things, cash a check on his way to the station.

He spread her three notes on the table—one in pen, the two in pencil. He reread the crazy incomplete formula.

He frowned. Would a scientist neglect the millionth-and-one

possibility? Would the commander of a trapped army disdain a strategem just because it was not in the books? This stuff looked like gibberish. Yesterday it might have meant something to him emotionally. Today it was just nonsense. But tomorrow night it might conceivably represent a fantastic last chance.

But to compromise with magic?

"Norman, you *must* do what I tell you." The words stared at him.

After all, he might need the junk to pacify her if he found her in a near-insane state.

He went into the kitchen and got a ball of white twine.

He rummaged in the closet for his squash racket and cut out the two center strings. That ought to do for gut.

The fireplace had not been cleaned since the stuff from Tansy's dressing table had been burned. He poked around the edges until he found a bit of blackened rock that attracted a needle. Lodestone.

He located the recording of Scriabin's "Ninth Sonata" and started the phonograph, putting in a new needle. He glanced at his wrist watch and paced the room restlessly. Gradually the music took hold of him. It was not pleasant music. There was something tantalizing and exasperating about it, with its droning melody and rocking figures in the base and shakes in the treble and elaborate ornamentation that writhed up and down the piano keyboard. It rasped the nerves.

He began to remember things he had heard about it. Hadn't Tansy told him that Scriabin had called his "Ninth Sonata" a "Black Mass" and had developed an antipathy to playing it? Scriabin, who had conceived a color organ and tried to translate mysticism into music and

died of a peculiar lip infection. An innocent-faced Russian with a huge curling mustache. Critical phrases Tansy had repeated to him floated through his mind. "The poisonous 'Ninth Sonata'—the most perfidious piece of music ever conceived—" Ridiculous! How could music be anything but an abstract pattern of tones?

And yet while listening to the thing, one could think differently.

Faster and faster it went. The lovely second theme became infected, was distorted into something raucous and discordant—a march of the damned—a dance of the damned—breaking off suddenly when it had reached an unendurable pitch. Then a repetition of the droning first theme, ending on a soft yet grating note low in the keyboard.

He removed the needle, sealed it in an envelope, and packed it along with the rest of his stuff. Only then did he ask himself why, if he were gathering this junk merely to pacify Tansy, had he bothered to play the "Ninth Sonata" with the needle. Certainly an unused needle would have done just as well. He shrugged his shoulders.

On an afterthought, he tore out of the big dictionary a page carrying an illustrated list of knots.

The telephone stopped him as he was going out.

"Oh, Professor Saylor, would you mind calling Tansy to the phone?" Mrs. Carr's voice was very amicable.

He repeated what he had told Mrs. Sawtelle.

"I'm glad she's having a rest in the country," said Mrs. Carr. "You know, Professor Saylor, I don't think that Tansy's been looking so well lately. I've been a little worried. You're sure she's all right?"

At just that moment, without any

warning whatever, another voice cut in.

"What's the idea of checking up on me? Do you think I'm a child? I know what I'm doing!"

"Be quiet!" said Mrs. Carr, sharply. Then in her sweet voice, "I think someone must have cut in on us. Good-by, Professor Saylor."

The line went dead. Norman frowned. That second voice had sounded remarkably like Evelyn Sawtelle's.

He picked up his suitcase and walked out.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BUS driver they pointed out to Norman in Jersey City had thick shoulders and sleepy, competent-looking eyes. He was standing by the wall, smoking a cigarette.

"Sure, she must have been with me," he told Norman after thinking a moment. "A pretty woman, on the small side, in a gray dress, with a silver brooch like you mentioned. One suitcase. Light pigskin. I figured her out as going to see someone who was very sick or had been in an accident, maybe."

Norman curbed his impatience. If it had not been for the hour-and-a-half delay outside Jersey City, his train would have been here well ahead of the bus, instead of twenty minutes behind it.

He said, "I want, if possible, to get a line on where she went after she left your bus. The men at the desk can't help me."

The driver looked at Norman. But, he did not say, "Whatcha wanta know for?"—for which Norman was grateful. He seemed to decide that Norman was okay.

He said, "I can't be sure, mister, but there was a local bus going down

the shore. I think she got on that."

"Would it stop at Bayport?"

The driver nodded.

"How long since it left?"

"About twenty minutes."

"Could I get to Bayport ahead of it? If I took a cab?"

"Just about. If you wanted to pay the bill there and back—and maybe a little extra—I think Alec could take you." He waved casually at a man sitting in a cab just beyond the station. "Mind you, mister, I can't say for certain she got on the shore bus."

"That's all right. Thanks a lot."

In the glow of the street lamp Alec's foxy eyes were more openly curious than the bus driver's, but he did not make any comments.

"I can do it," he said cheerfully, "but we haven't any time to waste. Jump in."

The shore highway led through lonely stretches of marsh and wasteland. Occasionally Norman caught the sibilant rustle of the leagues of tall stiff seagrass, and amid the chemical stench of industry, a brackish tang from the dark inlets crossed by long low bridges. The odor of the Bay.

Indistinctly he made out factories, oil refineries, and scattered houses.

They passed three or four busses without Alec making any comment. He was paying close attention to the road.

After a long while Alec said, "That should be her."

A constellation of red and green taillights was vanishing over the rise ahead.

"About three miles to Bayport," he continued. "What shall I do?"

"Just get to Bayport a little ahead of her, and stop at the bus station."

"Okay."

They overtook the bus and swung

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FTC Report Aug. '72.

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined
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around it. The windows were too high for Norman to see any of the occupants. Besides, the interior lights were out.

As they drew ahead, Alec nodded confirmingly, "That's her, all right."

The bus station at Bayport was also the railway depot. Vaguely Norman remembered the loosely planked platform, the packed cinders between it and the railway tracks. The depot was smaller and dingier than he recalled, still boasted the grotesque ornamental carpentry of the days when Bayport had been a summer resort for New York's rich. The windows of the depot were dark but there were several cars and a lone local cab drawn up and there were some men standing around talking in low voices and a couple of soldiers, from Fort Monmouth on nearby Sandy Hook, he supposed.

He had time to scent the air, with its faint and not unpleasant trace of fishiness. Then the bus pulled in.

Several passengers stepped down, looking around to spot the people waiting for them.

Tansy was the third. She was staring straight ahead. She was carrying the pigskin suitcase.

"Tansy," he said.

She did not look at him. He noted a large black stain on her right hand, and remembered the spilled ink on his study table.

"Tansy!" he said. "Tansy!"

She walked straight past him, so close that her sleeve brushed his.

"Tansy, what's the matter with you?"

He had turned and hurried after her. She was headed for the local cab. He was conscious of a silence and of curious unfriendly glances. They made him angry.

She did not slacken her pace. He grabbed her elbow and pulled her

around. He heard a remonstratory murmur behind him.

"Tansy, stop acting this way! Tansy!"

Her face looked frozen. She stared past him without a hint of recognition in her eyes.

That infuriated him. He did not pause to think. Accumulated tensions prodded him into an explosion. He grabbed both elbows and shook her. She still looked past him, completely aloof—a perfect picture of an aristocratic woman enduring brutality. If she had yelled and fought him, the men might not have interfered.

He was jerked back.

"Lay off her!"

"Who do you think you are, anyway?"

She stood there, with maddening composure. He noticed a scrap of paper flutter out of her hand. Then her eyes met his and he seemed to see fear in them; then he felt a slight, queer shock, as if something had passed from her eyes to his; simultaneously with that and with the pricking of his scalp, there seemed to rise up behind her, but for one moment only, a shaggy black form twice her height, with hulking shoulders, outstretched massive hands, and dully glowing eyes.

FOR ONE MOMENT only, though. When she turned away, she was alone. Though he did fancy that her shadow on the planking was swollen out and shot up to a size that the position of the street lamp would not account for. Then they swung him around and he could no longer see her.

In a queer sort of daze—for the kind of hallucination he had just experienced mixes badly with any other emotion—he listened to them jabber at him.

"I ought to take a crack at you," he finally heard someone say.

"All right," he replied in a flat voice. "They're holding my hands."

He heard Alec's voice. "Say, what's going on here?" Alec sounded cautious, but not unfriendly as if he were thinking. "The guy's my fare, but I don't know anything about him."

One of the soldiers spoke. "Where's the lady? She doesn't seem to be making any complaint."

"Yeah, where is she?"

"She got in Jake's cab and drove off," someone volunteered.

"Maybe he had a good reason for what he did," said the soldier.

Norman felt the attitude of the crowd change.

One of the men holding him retorted, "Nobody's got a right to treat a lady that way." But the other slackened his grip and asked Norman, "How about it? Did you have a reason for doing that?"

"I did. But it's my business."

He heard a woman's voice, high-pitched, "A lot of fuss over nothing!" and a man's, richly sardonic, "Mix in family quarrels—!"

Grumbling, the two men let him go.

"But mind you," said the more belligerent one, "if she'd stuck around and complained, I'd sure have taken a crack at you."

"All right," said Norman, "in that case you would have." His eyes were searching for the scrap of paper.

"Can anyone tell me the address she gave the cab driver?" he asked at random.

One or two shook their heads. The others ignored the question. Their feelings toward him had not changed enough to make them cooperative. And very likely, in the excitement, no one had heard.

Silently the little crowd drifted apart. People waited until they got out of earshot before beginning to argue about what had happened. Most of the cars drove off. The two soldiers wandered over to the benches in front of the depot, so they could sit down while they waited for their bus or train. Norman was alone except for Alec.

He located the scrap of paper in one of the slots between the worn planks. It had almost slipped through.

He took it over to the cab and studied it.

He heard Alec say, "Well, where do we go now?" Alec sounded dubious.

He glanced at his watch. Ten thirty-five. Not quite an hour and a half until midnight. There were a lot of things he could do to try and find Tansy, but he could not do more than a couple of them in that time. His thoughts moved sluggishly, almost painfully, as if that awful thing he had seemed to see behind Tansy had hurt his brain.

He looked around at the dim buildings. The seaward halves of some of the street lamps still showed traces of black paint from the old wartime dimout. Up a side street there were signs of life. He looked at the scrap of paper.

He thought of Tansy. He thought hard. It was all a question of what might help her most, of what his deepest loyalty to her must now direct him to do. Of course he could go chasing up and down along the shore, along the railroad tracks, though Lord knew to what point the taxi had taken her. He might be able to locate the old pier where they'd gone swimming and try waiting there. Or he could wait for the taxi she'd taken to come back. And he might go to the police, convince them

if he could that his wife intended suicide, get them to help him search.

But he also thought of other things. He thought of her confession of witchcraft, of how he had burned the last "hand," of the sudden telephone calls from Theodore Jennings and Margaret Van Nice, of the flurry of ill-will and undesired revelations that had struck him at the college. He thought of Jennings' asinine attempt on his life, of the recordings of a bull-roarer, the photograph of a dragon, and the stick-figure of tarot cards. He thought of the death of Totem, of the seven-branched lightning bolt, of his sudden attack of accident-proneness and suicidal fancies. He thought of the hallucination he had had just now of something behind Tansy. He thought hard.

He looked again at the scrap of paper.

He came to a decision.

"I think there's a hotel on the main street," he told Alec. "You can drive me there."

CHAPTER XIV

"EAGLE HOTEL," read the black-edged gold letters on the plate-glass window, behind which the narrow lobby with its half-dozen empty chairs was nakedly revealed.

He told Alec to wait, and took a room for the night. The clerk was an old man in a shiny blue coat. Norman saw from the register that no one else had checked in recently. He carried his bag up to the room and immediately returned to the lobby.

"I haven't been here for ten years," he told the clerk. "I believe there is a cemetery about five blocks down the street, away from the Bay?"

The old man's sleepy eyes blinked wide open.

"Bayport Cemetery? Just three

blocks, and then a block and a half to the left. But—" He made a vague questioning in his throat.

"Thank you," said Norman.

After a moment's thought, he paid off Alec, who took the money and with obvious relief kicked his cab into life. Norman walked down the main street, away from the Bay.

After the first block there were no more stores. In this direction, Bayport petered out quickly. Most of the houses were dark. And after he turned left there were no more street lights.

The gates of the cemetery were locked. He felt his way along the wall, behind the masking shrubbery, trying to make as little noise as possible, until he found a scrubby tree whose lowest branch could bear his weight. He got his hands on the top of the wall, scrambled up, and cautiously let himself down on the other side.

Behind the wall it was very dark. There was a rustling sound, as if he had disturbed some small animal. More by feeling than sight he located a headstone. It was a thin one, worn, mossy toward the base, and tilted at an angle. Probably from the middle of last century. He dug into the earth with his hand, and filled an envelope he took from his pocket.

He got back over the wall, making what seemed a great deal of noise in the shrubbery. But the street was empty as before.

On his way back to the hotel he looked up at the sky, located the Pole Star, and calculated the orientation of his room.

As he crossed the lobby, he felt the curious gaze of the old clerk boring into him.

His room was in darkness. Chill salt air was pouring through the open window. He locked the door, shut the

window, pulled down the blind, and switched on the light— a glaring overhead which revealed the room in all its dingy severity. A cradle phone struck the sole modern note.

He took the envelope out of his pocket and weighed it in his hand. His lips curled in a peculiarly bitter smile. Then he re-read the scrap of paper that had fluttered from Tansy's hand.

a small quantity of graveyard dirt and wrap all in a piece of flannel, wrapping widdershins. Tell it to stop me. Tell it to bring me to you.

Graveyard dirt. That was what he had found in Tansy's dressing table. It had been the beginning of all this. Now he was fetching it himself.

He looked at his watch. Eleven twenty.

He cleared the small table and set it in the center of the room, jabbing in his penknife to mark the edge facing east. "Widdershins" meant "against the sun"—from west to east.

He placed the necessary ingredients on the table, cutting a short strip of flannel from the hem of his bathrobe, and fitted together the four sections of Tansy's note. The distasteful, bitter smile did not leave his lips.

Taken together, the significant portions of the note read:

Take four lengths of four-inch white cord and a length a gut, a bit of platinum or iridium, a piece of lodestone, a phonograph needle that has only played Scriabin's "Ninth Sonata." Tie the four white cords into a granny, a reef, a cat's-paw, and a carrick bend. Tie the gut in a bowline. Add a small quantity of graveyard dirt, and wrap it all in a piece of flannel, wrapping

widdershins. Tell it to stop me. Tell it to bring me to you.

In general outline, it was similar to a hundred recipes for Negro tricken-bags he had seen or been told about. The phonograph needle, the knots, and one or two other items were obvious "white" additions.

And it was all on the same level as the mental operations of a child or neurotic adult who religiously steps on, or avoids, sidewalk cracks.

A clock outside bonged the half-hour.

NORMAN SAT THERE looking at the stuff. It was hard for him to begin. It would have been different, he told himself, if he were doing it for a joke or a thrill, or if he were one of those people who dope up their minds with morbid supernaturalism—who like to play around with magic because it's medieval and because illuminated manuscripts look pretty. But to tackle it in dead seriousness, to open your mind deliberately to superstition—that was to join hands with the forces pushing the world back into the dark ages, to cancel the term "science" out of the equation.

But, behind Tansy, he had seen that thing. Of course it had been an hallucination. But when hallucinations start behaving like realities, with a score of coincidences to back them up, even a scientist has to face the possibility that he may have to treat them like realities. And when hallucinations begin to threaten you and yours in a direct physical way—

No, more than that. When you must keep faith with someone you love. He reached out for the first length of cord and tied the ends together in a granny.

When he came to the cat's-paw, he

had to consult the page he had torn from the dictionary. After a couple of false starts he managed it.

But on the carrick bend he was all thumbs. It was a simple knot but no matter how he went about it, he could not get it to look like the illustration. Sweat broke out on his forehead. "Very close in the room," he told himself. "I'm still overheated from rushing about." The skin on his fingertips felt an inch thick. The ends of the cord kept eluding them. He remembered how Tansy's fingers had rippled through the knots.

Eleven forty-one. The phonograph needle started to roll off the table. He dropped the cord and laid the phonograph needle against his fountain pen, so it would not roll. Then he started again on the knot.

For a moment he thought he must have picked up the gut, the cord seemed so stiff and unresponsive. Incredible what nervousness can do to you, he told himself. His mouth was dry. He swallowed with difficulty.

Finally, by keeping his eyes on the illustration and imitating it step for step, he managed to tie a carrick bend. All the while he felt as if there were more between his fingers than a cord, as if he were manipulating against a great inertia. Just as he finished, he felt a slight prickly chill, like the onset of fever, and the light overhead seemed to dim a trifle. Eyestrain.

The phonograph needle was rolling in the opposite direction, spinning faster and faster. He slapped his hand down on it, missed it, slapped again, caught it at the edge of the table.

Just like a Ouija board, he told himself. You try to keep your fingers, poised on the planchette, perfectly motionless. As a result,

muscular tensions accumulate. They reach the breaking point. Seemingly without any volition on your part, the planchette begins to roll and skid about on its three little legs, traveling from letter to letter. Same thing here. Nervous and muscular tensions made it difficult for him to tie knots. Obeying a universal tendency, he projected the difficulty into the cord. And, by elbow and knee pressure, he had been doing some unconscious table tipping.

Between his fingers, the phonograph needle seemed to vibrate, as if it were a tiny part of a great machine. There was a very faint suggestion of electric shock. Unbidden, the torturesome, clangorous chords of the "Ninth Sonata" began to sound in his mind. Rot! One well-known symptom of extreme nervousness is a tingling in the fingers, often painfully intense. But his throat was dry and his snort of bitter contempt sounded choked.

He pinned the needle in the flannel for greater safety.

Eleven forty-seven. Reaching for the gut, his fingers felt as shaky and weak as if he just climbed a hundred-foot rope hand over hand. The stuff looked normal, but it was slimy to the touch, as if it had just been dragged from the beast's belly and twisted into shape. And for some moments he had been conscious of an acrid, almost metallic odor replacing the salt smell of the Bay. Tactual and olfactory hallucinations joining in with the visual and auditory, he told himself. He could still hear the "Ninth Sonata."

He knew how to tie a bowline backwards, and it should have been easier since the gut was not as stiff as it ought to be, but he felt there were other forces manipulating it or other mentalities trying to give orders to

his fingers, so that the gut was trying to tie itself into a slip-knot, a reef, a half hitch—anything but a bowline. His fingers ached, his eyes were heavy with an abnormal fatigue. He was working against a mounting inertia, a crushing inertia. He remembered Tansy telling him that night when she had confessed her witchcraft to him: "There's a law of reaction in all conjuring—like the kick of a gun—" Eleven fifty-two.

With a great effort, he canalized his mental energy, focused his attention only on the knot. His numb fingers began to move in an odd rhythm, a rhythm of the "Ninth Sonata," *piu vivo*. The bowline was tied.

The overhead light dimmed markedly, throwing the whole room into sooty gloom. Hysterical blindness, he told himself—and small town power systems are always going on the blink. It was very cold now, so cold that he fancied he could see his breath. And silent, terribly silent. Against that silence he could feel and hear the rapid drumming of his heart, accelerating unendurably to the thundering, swirling rhythm of the music.

Then, in one instant of diabolic, paralyzing insight, he knew that *this* was sorcery. No mere puttering about with ridiculous medieval implements, no effortless sleight of hand, but a straining, back-breaking struggle to keep control of *forces summoned*, of which the objects he manipulated were only the symbols. Outside the walls of the room, outside the walls of his skull, outside the impalpable energy-walls of his mind, he felt those forces gathering, swelling up, dreadfully expectant, waiting for him to make a false move so that they could crush him.

He could not believe it. He did not

believe it. Yet somehow he *had* to believe it.

The only question was—would he be able to stay in control?

ELEVEN FIFTY-SEVEN. He started to gather the objects together on the flannel. The needle jumped to the lode-stone, dragging the flannel with it, and clung. It shouldn't have; it had been a foot away. He took a pinch of graveyard dirt. Between finger and thumb, each separate particle seemed to crawl, like a tiny maggot. He sensed that something was missing. He could not remember what it was. He fumbled for the formula. A current of air was blowing the scraps of paper off the table. He sensed an eager, inward surge of the forces outside, as if they knew he was failing. He clutched at the papers, managed to pin them down. Bending close, he made out the words "platinum or iridium." He jabbed his fountain pen against the table, broke off the nib, and added it to the other objects.

He stood at the side of the table away from the knife that marked the east, trying to steady his shaking hands against the edge. His teeth were chattering. The room was utterly dark now except for the impossible bluish light that beat through the window shade. Surely the street light wasn't that mercury-vapor hue.

Abruptly the strip of flannel started to curl like a strip of heated gelatine, to roll itself up from east to west, *with* the sun.

He jerked forward, got his hand inside the flannel before it closed, drew it apart—in his numb hands it seemed like metal—and rolled it up against the sun—widershins.

The silence was intensified. Even the sound of his beating heart was cut off. He knew that something was

listening with a terrible intentness for his command, and that something was hoping with an even more terrible avidity that he would not be able to utter that command.

Somewhere a clock was booming—or was it not a clock, but the secret sound of time? Nine—ten—eleven—twelve.

His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. He kept on choking soundlessly. It seemed to him that the walls of the room were closer to him than they had been a minute before.

Then, in a dry, croaking voice he managed: "Stop Tansey. Bring her here."

Norman felt the room shake, the floor buckle, and lift under his feet, as if an earthquake had visited New Jersey. Darkness became absolute. The table, or some force erupting from the table, seemed to rise and strike him. He felt himself flung back onto something soft.

Then the forces were gone. In all things, tension gave way to limpness. Sound and light returned. He was sprawled across the bed. On the table was a little flannel packet, no longer of any consequence.

He felt as if he had been doped, or were waking after a debauch. There was no inclination to do anything. Emotion was absent.

Outwardly everything was the same. Even his mind, with automatic rationality, could wearily take up the thankless task of explaining his experiences on a scientific basis—weaving an elaborate web in which psychosis, hallucination, and improbable coincidences were the strands.

But inwardly something had changed, and would never change back.

Considerable time passed.

He heard steps mounting the

stairs, then in the hall. They made a *squish-squish* sound, as if the shoes were soaking wet.

They stopped outside his door.

He crossed the room, turned the key in the lock, opened the door.

A strand of seaweed was caught in the silver brooch. The gray suit was dark now and heavy with water, except for one spot which had started to dry and was faintly dusted with salt. The odor of the Bay was intimate and close. There was another strand of seaweed clinging to one ankle against the wrinkled stockings.

Around the stained shoes, a little pool of water was forming.

His eyes traced the wet footprints down the hall. At the head of the stairs the old clerk was standing, one foot still on the last step. He was carrying a small pigskin suitcase, waterstained.

"What's this all about?" he quavered, when he saw that Norman was looking at him. "You didn't tell me you were expecting your wife. She looks like she'd thrown herself in the Bay. We don't want anything queer happening in this hotel— anything wrong."

"It's quite all right," said Norman, prolonging the moment before he would have to look in her face. "I'm sorry I forgot to tell you. May I have the bag?"

"—only last year we had a suicide"—the old clerk did not seem to realize he was speaking his thoughts aloud—"bad for the hotel." His voice trailed off. He looked at Norman, gathered himself together, and came hesitatingly down the hall. When he was a few steps away, he stopped, reached out and put down the suitcase, turned, and walked rapidly away.

Unwillingly, Norman raised his eyes until they were on a level with



hers.

The face was pale, very pale, and without expression. The lips were tinged with blue. Wet hair was plastered against the cheeks. A thick lock crossed one eye socket, like a curtain, and curled down toward the throat. One dull eye stared at him, with recognition. And no hand moved to brush the lock of hair away from the other.

From the hem of the skirt, water was dripping.

The lips parted. The voice had the monotonous murmur of water.

"You were too late," the voice said. "You were a minute too late."

CHAPTER XV

FOR A third time they had come back to the same question. Norman had the maddening sensation of following a robot that was walking in a huge endless circle and always treading on precisely the same blades of grass as it retraced its path.

With the hopeless conviction that he would not get any further this time, he asked the question again: "But how can you lack consciousness, and at the same time *know* that you lack consciousness? If your mind is blank, you cannot at the same time be aware that your mind is blank."

The hands of his watch were creeping toward three in the morning. The chill and sickness of night's lowest ebb pervaded the dingy hotel room. Tansy sat stiffly, wearing Norman's bathrobe and fleece-lined slippers, with a blanket over her knees and a bath towel wrapped around her head. They should have made her look childlike and perhaps even artlessly attractive. They did not. If you were to unwind the towel you would find the top of the skull sawed off and the brains removed, an empty

bowl—that was the illusion Norman experienced every time he made the mistake of looking into her eyes.

The pale lips parted. "I know nothing. I only speak. They have taken away my soul. But my voice is a function of my body."

You could not even say the voice was patiently explanatory. It was too empty and colorless even for that. The words, clearly enunciated and evenly spaced, all sounded alike. They were like the noise of a machine.

The last thing he wanted to do was hammer questions at this stiff pitiful figure, but he felt that at all costs he must awaken some spark of feeling in the masklike face; he must find some intelligible starting point before his own mind could begin to work effectively.

"But Tansy, if you can talk about the present situation, you must be aware of it. You're here in this room with me!"

The towed head shook once, like that of a mechanical doll.

"Nothing is here with you but a body. 'I' is not here."

His mind automatically corrected "is" to "am" before he realized that there had been no grammatical error. He trembled.

"You mean," he asked, "that you can see or hear nothing? That there is just a blackness?"

Again that simple mechanical headshake, which carried more absolute conviction than the most heated protestations.

"My body sees and hears perfectly. It has suffered no injury. It can function in all particulars. But there is nothing inside. There is not even a blackness."

His tired, fumbling mind jumped to the subject of behavioristic psychology and its fundamental asser-

tion that human reactions can be explained completely and satisfactorily without once referring to consciousness—that it need not even be assumed that consciousness exists. Here was the perfect proof. And yet not so perfect, for the behavior of this body lacked every one of those little mannerisms whose sum is personality. The way Tansy used to squint when thinking through a difficult question. The familiar quirk at the corners of her mouth when she felt flattered or slyly amused. All gone. Even the quick triple headshake he knew so well, with the slight rabbit-like wrinkling of the nose, had become a robot's "No."

Her sensory organs still responded to stimuli. They sent impulses to the brain, where they traveled about and gave rise to impulses which activated glands and muscles, including the motor organs of speech. But that was all. None of those intangible flurries we call consciousness hovered around the webwork of nervous activity in the cortex. What had imparted style—Tansy's style, like no one else's—to every movement and utterance of the body, was gone. There was left only a physiological organism, without sign or indication of personality. Not even a mad or an idiot soul—yes! why not use that old term now that it had an obvious specific meaning?—peered from the gray-green eyes which winked at intervals with machine-like regularity, but only to lubricate the cornea, nothing more.

He felt a grim sort of relief to go through him, now that he had been able to picture Tansy's condition in definite terms. But the picture itself—his mind veered to the memory of a newspaper story about an old man who had kept locked in his bedroom for years the body of a

young woman whom he loved and who had died of an incurable disease. He had maintained the body in an astonishing state of preservation by wax and other means, they said, had talked to it every night and morning, had been convinced that he would some day reanimate it completely—until they found out and took it away from him and buried it.

He suddenly grimaced. Damn it all, he commented inwardly, why did he let his mind go off on these wild fancies, when it was obvious that Tansy was suffering from an unusual nervous condition, a strange self-delusion?

Obvious?

Wild fancies?

"Tansy," he asked, "when your soul went, why didn't you die?"

"Usually the soul lingers to the end, unable to escape, and vanishes or dies when the body dies," the voice answered, its words as evenly spaced as if timed to a metronome. "But He Who Walks Behind was tearing at mine. There was the weight of green water against my face. I knew it was midnight. I knew you had failed. In that moment of despair, He Who Walks Behind was able to draw forth my soul. In the same moment Your Agent's arms were about me, lifting me toward the air. My soul was close enough to know what had happened, yet not close enough to return. Its doubled anguish was the last memory it imprinted on my brain. Your Agent and He Who Walks Behind concluded that each had obtained the thing he had been sent for, so there was no struggle between them."

The picture created in Norman's mind was so shockingly vivid that it seemed incredible that it could have been produced by the words of a mere physiological machine. And yet only a physiological machine could have

told the story with such total restraint.

"Is there nothing that touches you?" he asked abruptly in a loud voice, gripped by an intolerable spasm of anguish at the emptiness of her eyes. "Haven't you a single emotion left?"

"YES. ONE." This time it was not a robot's headshake, but a robot's nod. For the first time there was a stir of feeling, a hint of motivation. The tip of a pallid tongue licked hungrily around the pale lips. "I want my soul."

He caught his breath. Now that he had succeeded in awakening a feeling in her, he hated it. There was something so animal about it, so like some light-sensitive worm greedily wriggling toward the sunlight.

"I want my soul," the voice repeated mechanically, tearing at his emotions more than any plaintive or whining accents could have done. "At the last moment, although it could not return, my soul implanted that one emotion in me. It knew what awaited it. It knew there are things that can be done to a soul. It was very much afraid."

He ground out the words between his teeth. "Where do you think your soul is?"

"She has it. The woman with the small dull eyes."

He looked at her. Something began to pound inside him. He knew that it was rage, and for the moment he didn't care whether it was sane rage or not.

"Evelyn Sawtelle?" he asked huskily.

"Yes. But it is not wise to speak of her by name."

His hand shot out for the phone. He had to do something definite, or lose control of himself completely.

After a time he roused the night clerk and got the local operator.

"Yes, sir," came the singsong voice. "Hempnell 1284. You wish to make a person-to-person call to Evelyn Sawtelle—E-V-E-L-Y-N S-A-W-T-E-L-L-E, sir? . . . Will you please hang up and wait? It will take considerable time to make a connection."

"I want my soul. I want to go to that woman. I want to go to Hempnell." Now that he had touched off the blind hunger in the creature facing him, it persisted. He was reminded of a phonograph needle caught in the same groove, or a mechanical toy turned on to a new track by a little push.

"We'll go there all right." It was still hard for him to control his breathing. "We'll get it back."

"But I must start for Hempnell soon. My clothes are ruined by the water. I must have the maid clean and press them."

With a slow, even movement she got to her feet and started toward the phone.

"But, Tansy," he objected involuntarily, "it's three in the morning. You can't get a maid now."

"But my clothes must be cleaned and pressed. I must start for Hempnell soon."

The words might have been those of an obstinate woman, sulky and selfish. But they had less tone than a sleepwalker's.

She kept on toward the phone. Although he did not anticipate that he would do it, he shrank out of her way, pressing close against the side of the bed.

"But even if there is a maid," he said, "she won't come at this hour."

The pallid face turned toward him incuriously. "The maid will be a woman. She will come when she

hears me."

Then she was talking to the night clerk. "Is there a maid in the hotel? . . . Send her to my room. . . . Then ring her. . . . I cannot wait until morning. . . . I need her at once. . . . I cannot tell you the reason. . . . Thank you."

There was a long wait while he heard faintly the repeated ringing at the other end of the line. He could imagine the sleepy, surly voice that finally answered.

"Is this the maid? . . . Come at once to Room 37." He could almost catch the indignant answer. Then—"Can't you hear my voice? Don't you realize my condition? . . . Yes. . . . Come at once." And she replaced the phone in its cradle.

"Tansy—" he began. His eyes were on her still and once again he found himself making a halting preamble, although he had not intended to. "You are able to hear and answer my questions?"

"I can answer questions. I have been answering questions for three hours."

But—logic promptly wearily—if she can remember what has been happening these last three hours, then surely—And yet, what is memory but a track worn in the nervous system? In order to explain memory you don't need to bring in consciousness.

Quit banging your head against that stone wall, you fool!—came another inward prompting. You've looked in her eyes, haven't you? Well, then, get on with it!

"Tansy," he asked, "when you say that Evelyn Sawtelle has your soul, what do you mean?"

"Just that."

"Don't you mean that she, and Mrs. Carr and Mrs. Gunnison too, have some sort of psychological

power over you, that they hold you in a kind of emotional bondage?"

"No."

"But your soul—"

"—is my soul."

"Tansy." He hated to bring up this subject, but he felt he must. "Do you believe that Evelyn Sawtelle is a witch, that she is going through the motions of practicing witchcraft, just as you did?"

"Yes."

"And Mrs. Carr and Mrs. Gunnison?"

"They too."

"You mean you believe they're doing the same things that you did—laying spells and making charms, making use of their husbands' special knowledge, trying to protect their husbands and advance their careers?"

"They go further."

"What do you mean?"

"They use black magic as well as white. They don't care if they hurt or torment or kill."

"Why are they different in that way?"

"Witches are like people. There are the sanctimonious, self-worshipping, self-deceiving ones, the ones who believe their ends justify any means."

"Do you believe that all three of them are working together against you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because they hate me."

"Why?"

"PARTLY THEY hate me because of you and what your advancement might do to their husbands, and themselves. But more than that, they hate me because they sense that my inmost standards are different from theirs. They sense that, though I

conform on the surface, I do not really worship respectability. Witches, you see, are apt to have the same gods as people. They fear me because I do not bow down to Hempnall. Though Mrs. Carr, I think, has an additional reason."

"Tansy," he began and hesitated. "Tansy, how do you think it happens that these three women are witches?"

"It happens."

There was a silence in the room then, as Norman's thoughts dully revolved around the topic of paranoia. Then, "But Tansy," he said with an effort, "don't you see what that implies? The idea that all women are witches."

"Yes."

"But how can you ever—"

"Shh." There was no more expression to the sound than an escape of steam from a radiator, but it shut up Norman. "She is coming."

"Who?"

"The maid. Hide, and I will show you something."

"Hide?"

"Yes." She came toward him and he involuntarily backed away from her. His hand touched a door. "The closet?" he asked, wetting his lips.

"Yes. Hide there, and I will prove something to you."

Norman heard footsteps in the hall. He hesitated a moment, frowning, then did as she asked him.

"I'll leave the door a little ajar," he said. "See, like this."

The robot nod was his only answer.

There was a tapping at the door. Tansy's footsteps, the sound of the door opening.

"Yast for me, ma'am?" Contrary to his expectations, the voice was young. It sounded as if she had swallowed as she spoke.

"Yes, I want you to clean and press some things of mine. They've been in

salt water. They're hanging on the edge of the bathtub. Go and get them."

The maid came into his line of vision. She would be fat in a few years, he thought, but she was handsome now, though puffed with sleep. She had pulled on a dress, but her feet were in slippers and her hair was snarly.

"Be careful with the suit. It's wool," came Tansy's voice, sounding just as toneless as when it had been directed at him. "And I want them within an hour."

Norman half expected to hear an objection to this unreasonable request, but there was none. The girl said, "All rightie, ma'am," and walked rapidly out of the bathroom, the damp clothes hurriedly slung over one arm, as if her one object were to get away before she was spoken to again.

"Wait a minute, girl. I want to ask you a question." The voice was somewhat louder this time. That was the only change, but it had a startling effect of command.

The girl hesitated, then swung around unwillingly, and Norman got a good look at her face. He could not see Tansy—the closet door just cut her off—but he could see the fear come to the surface of the girl's sleep-creased face.

"Yes, ma'am?" she managed.

There was a considerable pause. He could tell from the way the girl shrank, hugging the damp clothes tight to her body, that Tansy had lifted her eyes and was looking at her.

Finally: "You know The Easy Way to Do Things? The Ways to Get and Guard?"

Norman could have sworn that the girl gave a start at the second phrase. But she only shook her head quickly, and mumbled, "No, ma'am. I . . . I

don't know what you're talking about."

"You mean you never learned How to Make Wishes Work? You don't conjure, or spell, or hex? You don't know the Art?"

This time the "No" was almost inaudible. The girl was trying to look away and failing.

"I think you are lying."

The girl twisted, hands tightly clutching her overlapping arms. She looked so frightened that Norman wanted to go out and stop it, but curiosity held him rigid.

The girl's resistance broke. "Please, ma'am, we're not supposed to tell."

"You may tell me. What Procedures do you use?"

The girl's perplexity at the new word looked real.

"I don't know anything about that, ma'am. I don't do much. Like when my boyfriend was in the army, I did things to keep him from getting shot or hurt, and I've spelled him so that he'll keep away from other women. And I kin annernt with erl for sickness. Honest, I don't do much, ma'am. And it don't always work. And lots of things I can't get that way." Her words had begun to run away with her.

"Very well. Where did you learn to do this?"

"Some I learned from Ma when I was a kid. And some from Mrs. Neidel—she got spells against bullets from her grandmother who had a family in some European war way back. But most women won't tell you anything. And some spells I kind of figure out myself, and try different ways until they work. You won't tell on me, ma'am?"

"No. Look at me now. What has happened to me?"

"Honest, ma'am, I don't know.

Please, don't make me say it." The girl's terror and reluctance were so obviously genuine that Norman felt a surge of anger at Tansy. Then he remembered that the thing beyond the door was incapable of either cruelty or kindness."

"I want you to tell me."

"I don't know how to say it, ma'am. But you're . . . you're *dead*." Suddenly she threw herself at Tansy's feet. "Oh, please, please, don't take my soul! Please!"

"I would not take your soul. You would get much the best of that bargain. You may go away now."

"Oh, thank you, thank you." The girl hastily gathered up the scattered clothes. "I'll have them all ready for you very soon. Really I will." And she hurried out.

ONLY WHEN he moved, did Norman realize that his muscles were stiff and aching from those few taut minutes of peering. The robed and toweled figure was sitting in exactly the same position as when he had last seen it, hands loosely folded, eyes still directed toward where the girl had been standing.

"If you knew all this," he asked simply, his mind in a kind of trance from what he had witnessed, "why were you willing to stop last night when I asked you?"

"There are two sides to every woman." It might have been a mummy dispensing elder wisdom. "One is rational, like a man. The other knows. Men are artificially isolated creatures like islands in a sea of magic, protected by their rationality and by the devices of their women. Their isolation gives them greater forcefulness in thought and action, but the women know. Women might be able to rule the world openly, but they do not want the work or the

responsibility. And men might learn to excel them in the Art. Even now there may still be male sorcerers, but very few.

"Last week I suspected much that I did not tell you. But the rational side is strong in me, and I wanted to be close to you in all ways. Like many women, I was not certain. And when I destroyed my charms and guards, I became temporarily blind to sorcery. Like a person used to large doses of a drug, I was uninfluenced by small doses. Rationality was dominant. I enjoyed a few days of false security. Then rationality itself proved to me that you were the victim of sorcery. And during my journey here I learned much, partly from what He Who Walks Behind let slip." She paused and added, with the blank innocent cunning of a child, "Shall we go back to Hempnell now?"

The phone rang. It was the night clerk, almost incoherent in his agitation, babbling threateningly about police and eviction. To pacify him, Norman had to promise to come down at once.

The old man was waiting at the foot of the stairs.

"Look here, mister," he began, shaking a finger, "I want to know what's going on. Just now Sissy came down from your room white as a sheet. She wouldn't tell me anything, but she was trembling like all get-out. Sissy's my granddaughter. I got her this job, and I'm responsible for her.

"I know what hotels are. I've worked in 'em all my life. And I know the kind of people that come to them—sometimes men and women working together—and I know the kind of things they try to do to young girls.

"Now I'm not saying anything against you, mister. But it was

mighty queer the way your wife came here. I thought when she asked me to call Sissy that she was sick or something. But if she's sick, why haven't you called a doctor? And what are you doing still up at four? Mrs. Thompson in the next room called to say there was talking in your room—not loud, but it scared her. I got a right to know what's going on."

Norman put on his best classroom manner and blandly dissected the old man's apprehensions until they began to look very unsubstantial. Dignity told. With a last show of grumbling the old man let himself be convinced. As Norman started upstairs, he was shuffling back to the switchboard.

On the second flight, Norman heard a phone ringing. As he was walking down the hall, it stopped.

He opened the door. Tansy was standing by the bed, speaking into the phone. Its dull blackness, curving from mouth to ear, emphasized the pallor of lips and cheeks and the whiteness of the toweling.

"This is Tansy Saylor," she was saying tonelessly. "I want my soul." A pause. "Can't you hear me, Evelyn? This is Tansy Saylor. I want my soul."

He had completely forgotten the call he had made in a moment of crazy anger. He no longer had any clear idea of what he had been going to say.

A low wailing was coming from the phone. Tansy was talking against it.

"This is Tansy Saylor. I want my soul."

He stepped forward. The wailing sound had swiftly risen to a squeal, but mixed with it was an intermittent windy whirring.

He reached out to take the phone. But at that instant Tansy jerked around and something seemed to hap-

pen to the phone.

When a lifeless object begins to act as if it has life, there is always the possibility of illusion. For instance, there is a trick of manipulating a pencil that makes it look as if it were being bent back and forth like a stick of rubber. And Tansy did have her hand to the phone and was twisting about so rapidly that it was hard to be sure of anything.

Nevertheless, to Norman it seemed that the phone suddenly became pliable and twisted about like a stumpy black worm, fastened itself tight to the skin, and dug into Tansy's chin and into her neck just below the ear, like a double-ended black paw. And with the squeal he seemed to hear a muffled sucking.

His reaction was immediate, involuntary, and startling. He dropped to his knees and ripped the phone cord from the wall. Violet sparks spat from the torn wire. The loose end whipped back with his jerk, seeming to writhe like a wounded snake, and wrapped itself around his forearm. To Norman it seemed that it tightened spasmodically, then relaxed. He tore it away with a panicky loathing, then stood up.

The phone had fallen to the floor. There seemed to be nothing out of the ordinary about it now. He gave it a little kick. There was a dull *plunk* and it slid solidly across the floor a few inches. He stooped and after hesitating a few moments gingerly touched it. It felt as hard and rigid as it should.

He looked at Tansy. She was standing in the same place. Not an atom of fear showed in her expression. With the unconcernedness of a machine, she had lifted a hand and was slowly massaging her cheek and neck. From the corner of her mouth a few drops of blood were

trickling.

OF COURSE, she could have bashed the phone against her teeth and cut her lip that way.

But he had seen—

Still, she might have shaken the phone rapidly, so that it only seemed to become pliable and bend.

But it hadn't looked that way. What he had seen . . . had been impossible.

But so many "impossible" things had been happening.

And it *had* been Evelyn Sawtelle at the other end of the phone. He *had* heard the sound of the bull-roarer coming over the phone. Nothing supernatural about that. If the recording of a bull-roarer had been played very loudly over the phone it would have sounded just like that. He *couldn't* have been mistaken about it. That was a fact and he must stick to it.

It gave him the emotional cue he needed. Anger. He was almost startled by the surge of hatred that went through him at the thought of that woman with the small dull eyes. For a moment he felt like an inquisitor confronted with evidence of malicious witchcraft. Visions of the rack and the wheel and the boot fitted through his mind. Then that phantasmagoria of the Middle Ages faded, but the anger remained, settling down to a steady pulse of detestation.

Whatever had happened to Tansy, he *knew* that Evelyn Sawtelle and Hulda Gunnison and Flora Carr were responsible. He had too much evidence in their own actions. That was another fact that he must stick to. Whether they were working on Tansy's mind by an incredibly subtle and diabolic campaign of suggestion, or by some unnamed means, they were

responsible.

There was no way of getting at them by psychiatry or law. What had happened in the past few days was something that only he, of all the men in the world, could believe or understand. He must fight them himself, using their own weapons against them—that other unnamed means.

In every way he must act as if he believed in that other unnamed means.

Tansy stopped massaging her face. Her tongue licked the lip where the blood was drying.

"Shall we go back to Hempnell now?"

"Yes!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE RHYTHMIC rattle and clank of the train was a Machine Age lullaby. Norman could hear the engine snoring. The wide, heat-baked, green fields swinging past the window of the compartment drowsed in the noonday sun. The farms and cattle and horses dotting them here and there were entranced by the heat. He would have liked to doze too, but he knew he would not be able to. And as for—she apparently never slept.

"I want to run over some things," he said. "Interrupt me if you hear anything that sounds wrong or you don't understand."

From the corner of his eye he noted the figure sitting between him and the window nod once.

It occurred to him that there was something terrible about an adaptability that could familiarize him even to—her, so that now, after only a day and a half, he was using her as a kind of thinking machine, asking her for memories and reactions in the same

way that a man might direct a servant to put a certain record on the phonograph.

At the same time he knew that he was able to make this close contact endurable only by carefully directing his thoughts and actions—like the trick he had acquired of never quite looking at her directly. And he was buoyed up a little by his hope that her present condition was only temporary. But if he had once let himself start to think what it would mean to live a life time, to share bed and board, with that coldness, that inner blackness, that vacancy . . .

Other people noticed the difference, all right. Like those crowds he had to push through in New York yesterday. Somehow people always edged away, so they wouldn't have to touch her, and he caught more than one following glance, poised between curiosity and fear. And when that other woman started to scream—lucky they had been able to lose themselves in the crowd.

The brief stopover at New York had given him time for some vitally necessary thinking. But he had been glad last night when it was over. The Pullman compartment seemed a haven of privacy.

What was it those other people noticed? True, if you looked closely, the heavy cosmetics only provided a grotesque and garish contrast to the underlying pallor, and powder did not wholly conceal the ugly dark bruise around the mouth. But the veil helped, and you had to look very closely—the cosmetics were practically a theatrical make-up. Was it her walk that they noticed, or the way her clothes hung? Her clothes always looked a little like a scarecrow's now, though you could not tell the reason. Or was there actually something to what the

Bayport girl had said?

It occurred to him that he was letting his mind wander because he didn't want to get on with the distasteful task he had set himself, this task that was abhorrent to him because it was so false—or because it was so true.

"Magic is a practical science," he began quickly. He talked to the wall, as if dictating. "There is all the difference in the world between a formula in physics and a formula in magic, although they have the same symbols, cause-effect relationship of wide generality. But a formula in magic is a way of getting or accomplishing something. It always takes into account the motivation or desire of the person invoking the formula—be it greed, love, revenge, or what not. Whereas the experiment in physics is essentially independent of the experimenter. In short, there has been little or no pure magic, comparable to pure science.

"This distinction between physics and magic is only an accident of history. Physics started out as a kind of magic, too—witness alchemy and the mystical mathematics of Pythagoras. And modern physics is ultimately as practical as magic, but it possesses a super structure of theory that magic lacks. Magic could be given such a super structure by research in pure magic and by the investigation and correlation of the magic formulas of different peoples and times, with a view to deriving basic formulas which could be expressed in mathematical symbols and which would have a wide application. Most persons practicing magic have been too interested in immediate results to bother about theory. But just as research in pure science has ultimately led, seemingly by accident, to results of vast prac-

tical importance, so research in pure magic might be expected to yield similar results.

"The work of Rhine at Duke, indeed, has been very close to pure magic, with its piling up of evidence for clairvoyance, prophecy, and telepathy; its investigation of the direct link age between all minds, their ability to affect each other instantaneously, even when they are on opposite sides of the earth."

He waited a moment, then went on.

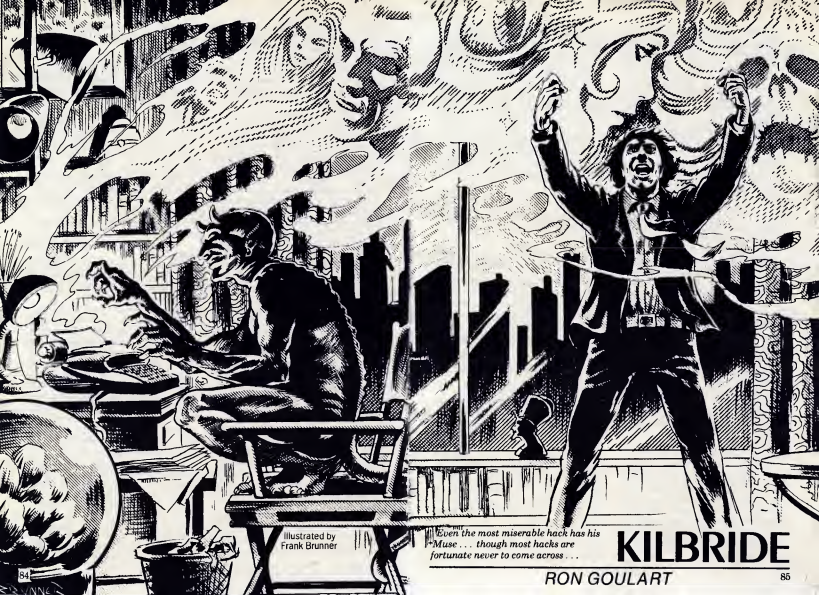
"The subject matter of magic is akin to that of physics, in that it deals with certain forces and materials, though these—"

"I believe it is more akin to psychology," the voice interrupted.

"How so?" He still looked at the wall.

"Because it concerns the control of other beings, the summoning of them, and the constraining of them to perform certain acts."

Good. That is very suggestive. Fortunately, formulas may still hold good so long as their reference is clear, though we are ignorant of the precise nature of the entities to which they refer. For example, a physicist need not be able to give a visual description of an atom, even if the term visual appearance has any meaning when applied to an atom, which is doubtful. Similarly, a sorcerer need not be able to describe the appearance and nature of the entity he summons—hence the common references in the literature of magic to indescribable and nameless horrors. But the point is well taken. Many seemingly impersonal forces, when broken down sufficiently, become something very much like personality. It's not too far-fetched to say that it would take a science resembling psychology to describe



Illustrated by
Frank Brunner

Even the most miserable hack has his
Muse . . . though most hacks are
fortunate never to come across . . .

KILBRIDE

RON GOULART

AFTER AWHILE they began to suspect where all the ashes in the room had come from, but they never did figure out what the stuff in the typewriter meant.

I suppose I'm the only person who does know what it means.

Otterson gave me the first hint back in April. He didn't have the big place in Beverly Hills then and was still doing most of his writing in coffee shops. I'd been down in Laguna watching the shooting of a toothpaste commercial I'd written. The big inflated toothpaste tube they'd built kept springing a leak and sinking out in the surf. Finally, around four o'clock the filming was called off. I wandered up from the beach to a small Mexican cafe to get some coffee before driving home.

Otterson was there, hunched over a plastic table under some dangling imitation grape leaves. He was scribbling away in a dime store tablet. "My days as a loser are almost over," he announced, noticing me.

"Then maybe you can buy a typewriter." I sat opposite him, ordered.

"I have a typewriter," he said. "I always do my initial drafts this way." He kept writing, or rather printing in big block letters, as he talked. "'You see, my family has always been rather fond of . . . blood.'" Slapping the tablet shut, he added, "Tripe. My days of tripe, though, are nearing an end."

"You're still scripting that thing on Channel 14?"

"*Romance In A Gothic Castle*, yeah," replied Otterson. He was a big man with thinning blond hair, forty two, twice divorced, living now in a lopsided hotel in Santa Monica. "One of the few local soap operas in the country. Got the highest rating of any afternoon show on Channel 14."

"Is that good?"

"Okay, so 14 isn't the top of the world," admitted Otterson. "Soon, however, you'll see me in a more exalted position. I'm on the rise."

Otterson was always on the rise. He'd had the same elated glow when he tried to sell NBC on the idea of a talk show for the nudists six months earlier. In the eleven years he'd been in Los Angeles, after arriving from someplace in Indiana, he'd had frequent attacks of euphoria, based on his latest sensational television or movie idea. Most of the ideas hadn't sold.

"What's the idea this time?" I asked him.

"I haven't got it yet," replied Otterson. "When I do, it's going to be terrific."

I tried my coffee, winced, and asked, "You're confident in advance?"

Otterson rubbed one knobby hand over his head. "There are a thousand people in Hollywood with writing talent, ten thousand more who think they have it. Most of them are either starving or writing tripe. What gives you the edge is luck, and I'm going to start having luck."

"You join some new group therapy thing?"

"Me? I'm a loner. It took me two marriages to find that out." Sitting up straight and stretching his arms out at his sides, Otterson laughed. "You're going to start seeing my name on the credits for national network shows and on movie screens, too. Eventually you'll see me on your TV, chatting with Carson, Griffin and the rest of those nitwits. Probably even a nice caricature on the front of *Time*. Finally, I'm even going to win *her*."

Otterson had been writing scripts for Channel 14's daily gothic soap opera for nearly two years. About

eleven months ago he'd fallen in love with a young actress named Maribelle Heather, a fragile indoor blonde. Maribelle had originally been signed to appear on the show as the third victim of a werewolf. Once Otterson saw her, he wrote in her resurrection, then persuaded the producer to make her a regular. Despite this, she was distant and indifferent to him.

"What's a loner need with a twenty-three-year-old skinny blonde?" I asked, making one last try at the coffee.

"I don't want to marry her," he assured me. "When I reach my proper place I won't have to. Important people can have any kind of setup they want."

"How is all this going to come about?"

Otterson chuckled, rubbed at his head again. He seemed on the edge of telling me some sort of secret.

Then one of the directors of our commercial came in to tell me they'd patched the toothpaste tube with a borrowed bike repair kit. We were going to try a few more shots while the light was good.

Saying goodbye to Otterson, I went back toward the sand.

FOR THE NEXT MONTH or so I was back and forth between L.A. and Washington, D.C. One of the additives in the canned hash account I worked on was the subject of a hearing in the capital. The agency wanted me to stand by in case the additive was outlawed and a batch of commercials had to be rewritten. When I finally got back my wife told me Otterson had called several times and was anxious to have me go see him.

"At that rundown hotel?"

"No, at a mansion up in Beverly

Hills known as Chateau Morocco."

When I drove around the vast circular drive of the place, Otterson waved at me from one of the turrets. If you remember seeing any version of a film called *Beau Geste* you'll get some idea of what the mansion looked like. Except that the fort in the picture didn't have an apple orchard and a swimming pool out on the front lawn.

Otterson was up there with a tablet in one knobby hand. "I want your opinion of the plumbing," he called.

"I thought they brought water in here in leather pouches. Who owns this place?"

"Me. I own it. I told you I was rising."

I located an outside staircase which twisted up the buff wall to his post. "This has to cost \$200,000, even with all the trouble they're having selling these old mansions."

"No, only \$150,000," said Otterson. "Actually I only paid a down payment. Before I buy it I want your opinion of the plumbing. That's important in a house."

"What do I know about plumbing?"

"You do commercials for that drain cleaner."

"They give us a fact sheet."

Chuckling, waving his tablet in the air, Otterson said, "Well, okay, I'll buy it anyway. How do you like it?"

"It's substantial."

He had a card table set up on the terrace. Leaning against it, he said, "I made thirty thou since I saw you last."

"How?"

Holding the tablet toward me, he riffled the pages. "With my wits. Plus a little additional help."

"You've got a collaborator?"

His head bobbed up and down. "You might say that. Come on in-

side."

Following him in through leaded French windows, I asked, "What did you sell?"

"Two scripts, one to an ABC Movie of the Week and one to CBS. They're both jumping up and down over my material," he told me. "NBC has got my series idea and I hear two of their VPs swear it's the best thing they've ever seen. They want to shoot it without a single change. That's the one about the white girl who marries a spade. We figure relevancy is good for one more go-round. And this is..."

"Who's we?"

"I meant me. I was using the editorial 'we.' One of the privileges of my elevated status."

He showed me through the entire vast sprawling place, or at least through twenty or so rooms. They were all empty of furniture or other trimmings. In the giant beamed living room sat a large old wooden crate. Up on the mantel was a framed photo of Maribelle Heather. I went close enough to see she had inscribed, "To Otto, with appreciation and affection, M."

"She likes the house." Otterson was grinning, rubbing at his sparse hair. He kicked out suddenly at the crate. "You know Goggins, don't you?"

"Producer of your show."

"He produces *Romance In A Gothic Castle*. It's not my show anymore. I quit three weeks ago." Circling the crate, Otterson said, "Goggins gave me this box of stuff. Thought it would be good background material for the soap opera. Apparently it was discovered when they tore down his grandmother's house in Ventura this past spring."

I glanced into the crate as he threw it open. A harsh musty smell drifted

up. There were two dozen very old books in the crate. Large fat books, with mildewed rat-chewed leather covers, marbled page edges and scarlet tassel book marks. "Old books," I said.

Otterson laughed. "Ancient in some cases. Goggins didn't know it but his sweet old granny must have been . . ." He stopped. He shut the lid.

"Must have been what?"

"Eccentric," said Otterson after a few seconds. "But then you'd have to be to contribute genes to Goggins."

That was the first time I saw the books. I don't think he showed them to anyone else, except perhaps Meribelle. And at that point she probably didn't understand what he was up to.

THREE WEEKS LATER, after I'd returned from a trip to the Eugene, Oregon, area to look at some trees we wanted to use in a cigarette ad for *Boys Life*, I saw Otterson on one of the local talk shows. He was wearing some kind of Italian clothes now and had more hair than he'd ever had. He had a handsome tan, too, but gave me the impression he was just getting over or just going into some kind of lingering illness. He and the host and a beautiful Swedish girl whose purpose I didn't catch were discussing the new film Otterson had been signed to write and produce for MGM. It was about a black lesbian detective and Otterson called it, several times, a new breakthrough in the cinema. I noticed he kept crossing back and forth between we and I in referring to himself.

At 2 AM that same night he phoned me. "You're someone I can trust," he began.

"Huh?" It usually takes me a

minute to get awake.

"Certain matters can't be discussed with anyone," he went on.

It sounded like some of his gothic soap opera dialogue. "Let's talk tomorrow. Call me at the agency."

"I need your help now, is the thing. I think I'm in Oxnard."

"Oxnard?" That's a town, more or less, a good two hours north of L.A.

"That's why I called you," he said. "I think I was teleported here. So I can't really ask just anyone . . ."

"Teleported? How can you get teleported to Oxnard?"

"Listen, it's lucky it's not Rio de Janeiro or Oslo, Norway," he said. "Could you come and pick me up? I'm at a closed down gas station. The only cab company I can find to call says they won't come into this area after midnight."

My wife woke up, asking, "What's the matter?"

"Otterson got himself teleported to Oxnard."

"Oh."

I agreed, eventually, to drive out there and retrieve him. At dawn, after he'd been riding silently back toward Beverly Hills for a half hour or more, he said, "It's getting out of hand."

"Your success?"

He yawned, shifting in the seat. "My success is based on two things," he said, "My talent, which I've always had. And a demon, which I only learned to summon up a few months back."

I took my eyes off the highway long enough to blink at him. "A demon?"

"He calls himself Kilbride, no first name. Well, very few demons have first names actually. I found out about him in one of those ancient occult books. There was a method of summoning him, which I decided to try. He's an ugly bastard, about two

feet high, squatty and covered with scales. He's a funny shade of green and . . ."

"You summoned up a demon named Kilbride?"

"That may not be his real name, but it's the one he's using this time around," explained Otterson. "He was dormant for almost three hundred years until I stumbled on the means of calling him forth. During the middle ages, though, he was very much in demand, and during the Renaissance. He worked with Leonardo, Marlowe . . ."

"You believe this demon, this Kilbride, teleported you out to Oxnard?"

"Yeah, he's been surly all day, ever since I summoned him up this morning. He makes quirky threats all the time lately. Tonight he carried one out."

At this point I assumed Otterson had broken down under the pressure of his new success. "Why did you want a demon in the first place?"

"Why does anybody want a demon? To get things done for me," he answered. "See, Kilbride specializes in inspiration. He's guaranteed, according to certain old runes and spells, to give whoever calls him forth terrific ideas. Sort of like a muse, only more diabolic."

"You think your success is due to Kilbride?"

"Right, my talent and his ideas," said Otterson. "I wasn't certain, the first time I saw him, a runty little guy like that, he'd be able to come up with any saleable ideas. He's turned out, though, to have an uncanny knack for hitting on exactly what's being looked for at the moment."

"He lives with you, does he?"

"I'm not sure exactly where he lives, some kind of other dimension or limbo. I summon him up when I want

him, we kick around ideas, then I send him back," he said. "I wouldn't want Kilbride around all the time."

"How can a demon who's been off in limbo for several centuries come up with surefire ideas for TV?"

"He was a little rusty at first," admitted Otterson. "Kept giving me ideas for sonnets and madrigals, wanted to put all our dialogue in blank verse. But I made him sit down in front of the television set and watch all the shows. I got him copies of *Time*, *Life* and the *Readers' Digest* to thumb through. He's very adaptive, a quick study. Wait until you see the new movie deal we . . . I'm going to pitch to Universal next week. They won't be able to turn it down."

I looked beyond him at the rising sun. "Don't you think you ought to see somebody?"

Otterson laughed. "Oh, I'm not goofy. A mansion in Beverly Hills, appearances on six talk shows scheduled for the next month, a burgeoning romance with *her*," he said, laughing again. "One thing I'm not is goofy."

"Well," I said. I trailed off there. I couldn't think of a pat phrase for a situation like this one.

I DIDN'T HEAR from Otterson for a few weeks. Part of the time I was in Washington again at some new hearings about one of the additives in our frozen chow mein. The day before Halloween, late in the afternoon, I was up near Otterson's fortress seeing one of our agency clients. I decided to stop in and see how his delusion was doing.

The house had furniture now. As I stopped my car a sofa chair came crashing through one of the big front windows to go rumbling across the yellowing lawn.

"That didn't hit you, did it?"

Otterson was looking, with concern, out the remains of the big window.

"Was it supposed to?"

"No, no, We were only having a little heated discussion here."

"Is Meribelle with you? I can come back . . ."

"She isn't in the habit of tossing chairs around." He beckoned with a knobby hand. "Might as well climb in this way. Don't cut yourself on those jagged shards."

I stepped over into his living room. He appeared to be alone. "Who were . . .?"

"It's okay, I sent him back. He's getting so damn cocky." Otterson had on one of his Italian outfits. "Success does that to some people, and to demons too, I guess. Lately he's been complaining I don't pay enough attention to him, or give him enough credit."

There was a substantial fire crackling in the giant fireplace. Walking toward it I asked, "What does Meribelle think about Kilbride?"

"She's never actually seen him," Otterson replied. "She doesn't like to come around here as much as she used to. She can sense he's lurking around. Did I tell you he was doing that?"

"Lurking around?"

"Yeah, I don't think he goes all the way back to . . . wherever it is. He's supposed to, but he's so damn surly lately." Otterson joined me in front of the stone fireplace. "He's got some sort of school boy crush on Meribelle, too. I told him it's foolish. I mean, she wouldn't even look twice at me for a long time. She's sure not going to pay attention to a little squatty guy, all green and covered with scales."

"Don't you think maybe . . ." I started to say.

"She wouldn't be looking twice at

you if I hadn't pushed you into the big time, bozo," said a rasping little voice.

Otterson opened his mouth, rubbed a hand through his new hair. "You're not supposed to come unless I . . ."

"Sure, sure, I know, bozo, I'm not, however, going to stand around in the other level while you badmouth me to this gink." Kilbride was strolling toward us, wobbling slightly on his cloven hooves. He was taller than Otterson had described him, almost three feet high. He had thin gnarled arms and legs, a head along the gargoyle line. "What did you think of that last script we did for CBS?" he asked me.

Licking my lips, I answered, "I haven't read it yet."

"You ought to, gink," Kilbride told me. "Because I know damn well those guys at CBS are going to butcher it. That dual montage effect I dreamed up, they'll butcher it for sure. I told bozo here he ought to ask them to let me visit the set during shooting. And I should be in the cutting room, too."

Otterson was holding his arms in an odd position, with his fingers touching various parts of his upper body. He began to mutter something which sounded like Latin, repeating several phrases over and over. "You're not to return unless summoned," he said to the demon.

"So you say, bozo. Myself I . . ." Kilbride collapsed in on himself, shimmering for an instant before vanishing entirely.

"And stay over there," shouted Otterson. "He's getting terrible about showing up uninvited."

I moved away from the spot where the demon had been. I kept on backing until I sat in a chair. "There really is a Kilbride," I said.

"I told you I wasn't goofy." Otterson put his hands behind his back. "He really annoys me sometimes. I'd send him back for good and let him sulk over there for another few centuries. Except he really is a sensational idea man." Gesturing around the living room, he added, "I wouldn't have any of this if it weren't for him."

"You shouldn't fool around with him anymore." I decided to get up. I walked to the broken window. Stepping over into the yard I said, "Keep in touch." I sprinted to my car and drove away.

I DIDN'T GO NEAR Otterson or hear from him until late November. It was the day the issue of *Newsweek* with his picture on the cover hit the stands. This was another middle of the night call.

This time, though, I was still awake, in my den trying to rewrite a batch of print ads to convince people our canned hash was better tasting than ever now that it didn't contain that banned additive. "Hello?" I said, clutching up the desk phone.

"Don't worry, I haven't been teleported anywhere."

"That's good news." Frankly I'd been avoiding him since I'd encountered Kilbride up there in the mansion back in October. I was making an effort to forget all about that scaly little demon. I hadn't even told my wife about him. She's a lovely woman, an ex-fashion model in fact, but her capacity to comprehend complex ideas is not great. Reading her horoscope in the daily astrology column in the *LA Times* is about as far as she goes in the occult area.

"I wanted to talk to you. Am I cutting into anything?"

"Some newspaper ads I have to turn in tomorrow."

"Oh, I'm sorry . . ."

He sounded extremely down. So I said, "I've got time to talk. What's the trouble?"

"Well, I'm having trouble with her."

I'd read in *Variety* about Meribelle's being signed to a three picture deal. "Is she dropping you?"

"No, nothing like that. We're both very much in love," said Otterson. "The thing is, she doesn't like the attention he's paying her."

"Who, Kilbride?"

"Him, yes. He sends her mash notes, boxes of chocolates, flowers. I think he's stealing the flowers from places like Forest Lawn. Anyway, it all upsets her. You know how fragile and sensitive she is."

"It would unsettle anybody, getting a floral piece from that thing," I pointed out. "You ought to get rid of him."

"I know. I intend to as soon as I get the first draft done on this new film I'm doing for Fellini. Did I tell you I'm doing a film with Fellini?"

"No, congratulations."

"I'm not sure I can get rid of him anymore. He pops in on his own schedule these days," said Otterson. "Well, actually I have one way of getting rid of him. It's a new spell I discovered in one of those ancient books. The only catch is, it's pretty powerful. It'll get rid of him for good, disintegrate the little bastard. I'm saving this one as my ace in the hole."

"Okay," I said. "You can't live with him, you can't live without him."

Otterson sighed. "You're absolutely right, it does sound like my marriages, doesn't it? I'm not at fault this time, though. Nobody could live with Kilbride."

"Use your spell now, get him out of

there for good," I advised. "You've got a lot of good credits now. You can get new assignments on your own."

"That's another thing. He starting to demand co-author credits on my scripts," Otterson complained. "He's very jealous. When he saw my picture on *Newsweek*—did you see that, by the way? Pretty good likeness, huh? I think maybe I should have worn my new hair—anyway, when he saw the picture he had a tantrum. Threw furniture, hopped around the yard disintegrating sparrows and . . ."

"Disintegrating them?"

"He turns them into soot somehow. It's a variation of the hold card trick I'm going to work on him. The nasty little . . ."

"Where'd you put the onions for my martinis?" demanded a raspy voice off in the background.

"He's back," whispered Otterson. "The onions are in the icebox, nitwit, look around. I'll call you later."

I sat with my hand in the hanging-up position for almost five minutes. Then I got up and clicked on a few more lights.

AS FAR as I can find out nobody saw Otterson after the 5th of December. He was in a men's shop down on Santa Monica Boulevard "looking furtive," the clerk testified later, trying to order a pet sweater for what the clerk assumed was an oddly shaped poodle or perhaps a chimp. On the 6th, quite late in the evening, he phoned Meribelle and told her only, "Oy, here he is again!"

When the girl didn't hear from him for another two days and didn't, though she said nothing about that, hear from Kilbride either, she called the police.

They broke into his mansion early on the morning of the 9th. It took them a while to search through the

thirty seven rooms. The police found a few broken windows and some overturned chairs. There was no sign of Otterson.

In his ground floor studio, though, they found all that ashes and soot. There was a fireplace in the big room, but the logs in there hadn't even been burned. The black smudgy material was splashed on everything, particularly against the wall behind and around Otterson's wooden desk.

There was a sheet of paper a third of the way into the type-writer. The officer who spotted it thought he'd discovered a suicide note. It wasn't that at all. They didn't know what it meant.

Though there's no way to confirm this now, I'm fairly certain I know what happened. After his quick call to Meribelle that night Otterson must have headed back to his studio.

Walking across the polished hardwood floors he heard a mechanical tapping sound. "What the hell is that little nitwit bastard doing in there?"

He pushed his studio door open.

There was Kilbride, propped on a phone directory, sitting in the desk chair. His little green fingers were on the typewriter keys.

"I told you not to fool with my

typewriter," said Otterson. "Get down from there."

"I don't need you anymore, bozo," the demon said.

Otterson walked closer and saw what Kilbride was doing. He went white, making an angry growling sound. He placed his hands in the spell-casting position and started reciting the new spell he'd been saving.

Realizing what Otterson was up to the demon lifted his hands from the keys, aimed the fingertips and commenced a spell of his own.

A great explosive popping filled the room. Otterson's spell took effect an instant before Kilbride's, changing the demon into a soot caricature of himself. Then, as the soot crumbled and drifted out of shape, the demon's spell worked on Otterson. He exploded into ashes, splashed against the wall and flickered down onto the thick rug.

The police showed me the sheet of paper they'd found in the typewriter. I told them I had no idea what it meant. Of course I know perfectly well.

Written on the page was: *The Streets Of Rome*, a screenplay by Kilbride. □



"... In The Wind"

There was something almost **human** in the eyes of the sleek female hound . . . something pitifully pleading in the look she gave Duncan Houndsglove, a wandering minstrel cum mercenary who'd found his way into the court of the rabid King Lor. What was the secret of the gray hound's mysterious origin? And how did the sorcerer Magrid fit in, that rheumy conjurer who'd as soon see Duncan dead as alive? And just what was the doom which Duncan foresaw for all connected with the tormented hound—whose eyes followed him like twin demons wherever he went? John Jakas knows the answers, and he provides them in **"The Running of Ladyhound,"** the lead novelette for our October issue.

Also that month we'll have a short story by George Zebrowski titled **"Fire of Spring,"** which deals with a man haunted by his heritage: a deep and irrational hatred which causes him to destroy himself and all he loves . . . again, and again . . . and again.

R. A. Lafferty returns in our third issue with a nefarious piece of nightmare titled, innocently enough, **"Goldfish."** It's about a man with the ability to transfer his mind to other living forms. The problem is, he can't always choose **where** . . .

Dennis O'Neil and Lin Carter offer feature articles on two diverse topics, werewolves and witchcraft. In his last article, **"The New Witchcraft,"** Lin Carter probes the modern-day witch cults, and their origins in medieval times. In his non-fact article, Dennis O'Neil reports an interview with a bona fide victim of lycanthropy, the disease which turns a man into a wolf. Both articles promise to be quite informative.

Other stories in our October issue include **"The Night People,"** by Alan Brennart, **"Writer's Curse,"** by Ramsey Campbell, and many more, including a new short story in the continuing saga of Dr. Warm, and his eternal struggle against the forces of darkness, and the agents of the **Consala Oscura.**

The October HAUNT OF HORROR. Don't miss it.





He could "find" anything . . . except the way out of his private nightmare.

FINDERS KEEPERS

ANNE McCAFFREY

Illustrated by Billy Graham

PETER turned in four dozen golf balls, including the monogrammed ones that Mr. Roche had been yelling about. The course manager was almost cheerful as he counted out Peter's finder's fee.

"You got a positive genius for scrounging balls, Pete. Don't know how you do it."

"My mother says everyone's got something they're good at," Peter replied and began to edge out the door of the stuffy office. Comments like that made him nervous: he half-expected he'd given away his secret and he and his mother'd be forced to run away again.

The manager grunted and muttered about keeping the members happy. Peter ducked out, running home with his pocketful of dollars. Mother'd be pleased although she didn't like him using his trick of "finding" for "material gain," as she put it. Since she'd been so sick that she couldn't work at the diner, they'd precious little choice. Peter'd wanted to get a full time job as caddy but his mother had resisted.

"You can't be like me, Peter. You got to have education and training. Your father was a smart man but he hadn't enough education." Her dedication made her eyes burn in her thin face. "It's education that matters in this world, Peter. You got to go to school." She emphasized that determination by stringing the words out and enunciating them clearly.

Peter adored his mother but he hated her attempts to imitate the "country-club accents": her soft drawl and her habit of quoting country cliches only ruined the effect she wanted to project.

Seven dollars he was bringing home today. Not bad, added to the twenty-two he'd made on the week-end caddying. This week's rent, food

and some of the medicine were now paid for. If he could just talk mother into letting him take a week off, now that the rains had stopped and spring sun was drying the greens, why he'd really make some money! Mr. Roche always tipped a fiver, especially when Peter kept track of those monogrammed balls of his.

"Son, if you could patent that ball-homing instinct of yours," Mr. Roche had said once, "you'd be a millionaire!"

It'd made Peter almost scared to go caddying for Mr. Roche again but the money was too tempting.

He came around the corner of their bungalow and skidded to an abrupt stop in the mud by the hydrangeas. Ken Fargo's green Mustang was parked at the curb. The only good thing about his mother being sick was that she didn't have to be pleasant to creeps like Ken Fargo.

"He's pleasant enough and all that," his mother had said and then shuddered, smiling quickly to reassure Peter. "There's just something . . . slippery about him." She sighed. "I suppose he can't help being sour and suspicious. People do and say the most awful things to collect insurance! And he's lonely."

His mother would understand being lonely, Peter thought. And she'd understand the awful things people do and say—particularly if you're any way different. But the knowledge hadn't made her sour, just more lonely and sad and cautious. Why she called his knack of finding things a gift, Peter didn't know. It was a curse! It'd brought them more grief, kept them moving about before he'd learn not to "find" everything lost . . .

AND WHY did Ken Fargo have to get unlost? They had thought him

well gone when the insurance company he investigated called off the search for the hijacked furs. There was a reward of \$15,000 for the return of those coats. Try as he would, Peter couldn't figure a legitimate way to "find" those furs. He hadn't been with the searchers when they'd looked in the old lead mine, or he'd have "found" the furs under the concealing layer of rubble in the ore carts. He couldn't go there alone. That old shaft was dangerous, the supports worm-ridden and damp-rotted. Every kid in town had been warned, on pain of a strapping, to stay away.

Peter paused at the front of the house. He didn't want to go in. He didn't like the way Ken Fargo looked at his mother and there wasn't much a thirteen year old boy could do to a six-foot man who'd fought his way out of some nasty corners (Fargo's words) and looked it from the scars on his face and knuckles. Peter took a deep breath and stomped up the three steps.

Peter knew the moment he walked into the room that Fargo had been badgering his mother. She was flushed and wringing her hands.

"Peter!" she all but swooped down on him. "Did you have a good day?" She was terribly relieved to see him.

"Sure did, mother." He held out the seven dollar bills. "Hello, Mr. Fargo." He had to acknowledge the man's presence of his mother would chew him out for bad manners no matter how much she disliked Fargo.

"Long time no see," the man replied, jerking his shoulders to settle the flashy gold sports jacket. He sauntered towards the window. "Sorry your ma's been ill. Should've let me know."

Peter blinked at him in surprise.

"Seven dollars," his mother was

saying, her voice more natural now. "Oh, Peter, that's wonderful. Were you caddyding?"

"That's just for scounging golf balls."

Something happened in the room, some indefinable change in the air that registered against Peter's nerves. When he looked at Ken Fargo, the man was occupied in lighting a cigarette. Peter glanced at his mother but she was proudly smoothing out the bills and arranging them all face up before she put them in her handbag.

"Peter's been such a help," she said to Fargo, an artificial heartiness in her soft voice. "We've been just fine. I'm well enough to go back to work next week but it was very nice of you to drop by and see us." She took two steps toward Fargo, her hand extended.

Fargo ignored the hand and sat down as if he meant to make a long visit. The knock at the door was a welcome diversion and Peter nearly collided with his mother as they both answered the summons.

"Oh, Mrs. Kiernan, have you seen my Victor?" It was Mrs. Anderson from across the street. Her three-year-old had such a perverse habit of straying that the distraught mother had taken to tying him to an old dog-run wire. "I told Henry the rope was frayed. I was doing the wash out back and I just didn't notice. I suppose I should've checked when I didn't hear him fretting but I wanted to finish . . . so I don't know how long he's been gone. Have you seen him? What with being home and all?"

Peter bristled but his mother shot him a look, reminding him that Mrs. Anderson was a nice woman and had more than a wayward Victor to burden her.

"No, Mrs. Anderson. I haven't seen

Victor."

"Which way is he likely to go, Mrs. Anderson?" asked Ken Fargo.

"Oh, I dunno. He could be halfway to town by now." The woman twisted back the lock of lank bleached hair that had escaped her pins. She swiveled her body slightly, looking pointedly at the green Mustang at the curb.

"Well, that's no problem. C'mon, Pete, you and me will take a little spin and see if we can locate the lady's wandering boy."

Peter gave his mother a swift look and she gave him a barely perceptible nod. A child was one of the lost items he could permissibly find.

"Shouldn't be no time at all before we have him safely back, Mrs. Anderson. Now don't worry. For one thing, I'm an insurance investigator and finding lost things is *my* business."

AGAIN THAT ELECTRIC FEELING charged the air, but before Peter could appeal to his mother, Kenny Fargo had hustled him out the door and into the car, all the time driving reassurances to Mrs. Anderson.

"Roll down that window, Petey boy," the man said and Peter set his teeth against the irritating familiarity. "Keep a sharp eye out on your side. I'll take care of mine."

Fargo's tone, smugly confident, gave Peter fair warning. Somehow Fargo knew that Peter could "find" things. Somehow Peter must discourage him.

"You just sing out when you see that brat, Pete. This car'll stop on a dime and hand you back six cents . . . ha ha ha . . . inflation, you know." Fargo deftly turned the Mustang into the road toward town. Peter let him although he knew that Victor Anderson was steadily moving in the op-

posite direction. "And I got a bone to pick with you."

Startled, Peter looked around but the man's frown was bogus.

"You should've let me know your mother was ill. She's a fine woman, your ma, and deserves the best. She could've had it if you'd let me know."

"We got along all right."

"Yeah, but she'd be well now with the proper food and care I could've provided. And I'd like to provide for her, you get what I mean?" An elbow prodded Peter in the ribs.

"We prefer to do things for ourselves."

"You're a good kid, Peter, but there're things a man can do that a boy can't."

Peter wanted to wipe that look from Fargo's face.

"Hey, you keep your eyes peeled for that kid. Let's find him in a hurry and get back. I got something to ask your ma and you might as well hear it."

Peter obediently faced the window but they reached the middle of the town without a sight of any child.

"How about that? We gotta search the whole town? I thought you said the kid went into town."

"No sir. Mrs. Anderson said she thought he'd be halfway to town by now."

"Well, goddamit, where is he?"

Peter looked Ken Fargo straight in the eyes. "I don't know."

The man's face turned black and grim, then as suddenly assumed a forced good humor.

"All right, kid. If he didn't go into town, maybe he went out of town?"

"Maybe someone's found him already. There's Officer Scortius."

The policeman was not the least bit pleased to hear that the Anderson kid was missing again and his remarks confirmed Peter's private

opinion that Mrs. Anderson was a prime nuisance in the tiny community of Jennings, Colorado. Fargo brandished his investigator's credentials, an additional irritant to Scortius who'd been forced to muck around the countryside trying to find the lost shipment of furs "alleged" to have been stashed somewhere near Jennings.

"Well, I'll see who we can find to help track the brat."

"I'll do the main road out of town."

Officer Scortius grunted and waddled off.

As they drew alongside her house, Mrs. Anderson was hanging over the gate, the picture of maternal anxiety. Clearly Victor had not been recovered but Fargo assured her heartily it was only a matter of moments and gunned the Mustang countryward.

"Okay, Peter, let's find that kid and end this soap opera," Fargo said between his teeth. "How far up the road is he?"

"Gee, how would I know?"

"How would you know? Because you'd know!"

The man's tone emphasized his certainty and Peter felt sick fear curl up from the pit of his belly.

"I get around the country, Petey boy. And I hear things, interesting things." He paused and his voice took on a conciliatory tone. "Look, Petey boy, I like your mother. I want to take care of her the way a man can. She oughtn't to have to work herself sick to give you a decent place to live and a good education. I know how set she is to see you educated. But you don't need much book learning to get ahead. Not you. You know, with your trick, we could be a team, you and me. In fact, we could be a top-drawer unbeatable team of private investigators."

That insistent, persuasive voice was bad enough: the arguments were worse. Fargo knew how to get to Peter.

"WOULDN'T that be great? Your mother not having to work anymore? And you, kid, you've been handicapped. You've made mistakes. It was foolish, you know, to find Lyle Grauber's missing stocks! To say nothing of that Cadillac in Colorado Springs!" Fargo's laugh was unpleasant and Peter cringed. That Cadillac business had meant they'd had to leave one of the nicest apartments they'd had. That was when they'd decided that Peter better check with mother before he "found" anything. There'd been a fortune in that Cadillac . . . and he couldn't tell them how he'd known where it was hidden. "Yes," Fargo was saying in an ominously casual way, "the police are still looking for the kid who told them where to find that Caddy—and skipped. They want him bad."

The Mustang, like the Cadillac, had become a trap.

"You must be mistaking me for someone else, Mister Fargo," Peter managed to say in a steady, apologetic voice.

"Oh, no, I haven't. I'm a topflight investigator because I'm smart. I put isolated clues together and come up with open-and-shut convictions."

If you looked adults in the face, they tended to think you couldn't be lying: but it took every ounce of self-control that Peter had learned in thirteen years to look Ken Fargo squarely in the eyes.

"You got me wrong, Mister Fargo. What makes you think I've ever been in Colorado Springs? And gee, if I could find things, like you do, and get the reward, I sure would for my mother's sake."

"How do you know about rewards,

kid?"

"Oh," and Peter shrugged, "you told mother once that you get 10— of the value of the stolen items you recover for your company."

Just the other side of the town limit sign, Fargo braked, swearing. Peter had "located" Victor cutting across the Omers' meadow now, out of sight of the road. He knew he'd be obliged to find the child but he couldn't do so until he'd got rid of Ken Fargo, and how was he to do that?

"Where is the brat? C'mon, Peter. Where is he? You know!"

"No, Mister Fargo. I don't know." And Peter stared the man directly in the eyes. "I wish I did because Mrs. Anderson always tips 50 cents when someone brings Victor home."

"You made seven bucks finding golf balls today. What about that?"

Peter forced himself to grin. "All you have to do is watch where Mr. Roche slices his balls and then go bring 'em in when he isn't looking. Half the ones I brought in today were in the pond anyway."

Doubt flickered across Ken Fargo's face.

"Honest, Mr. Fargo, I think you've got a case of mistaken identity."

A big Olds came piling down the road toward town. Cursing under his breath, Fargo pushed himself out of the Mustang and flagged the big car down.

"Yeah, what's the trouble, fella? No gas?" asked the driver, sticking his head out the window. Peter saw, with sinking heart, that it was Mr. Roche and he tried to squinch down in the seat. "Hi there, Pete. Find any more of my balls for me?" He flicked his cigarette to the roadside and gave Fargo his attention. "Kid's a genius finding m'balls in the grass. Like he could home in on them or something.

Caddy for me, Saturday, Pete? Ten sharp?"

Limp with defeat, Peter nodded and sank down in the bucket seat swallowing fiercely against the lump in his throat.

"Seen anything of a kid, too young to be off on his own?" asked Fargo.

"Kid? No. Nothing on the road from here to Hibernia."

The Olds drove off, leaving Peter at Fargo's mercy.

"Kid homes in on them or something, huh?" "No, Mr. Fargo, you got a case of mistaken identity!" " Fargo's voice was savage as he slid into the driver's seat. "All right, Peter me lad. Now unless you want some trouble, real trouble, with the cops in Colorado Springs—because they are looking for you—you better tell me where those furs are!"

"The furs?"

Fargo grabbed Peter by the wrist. He was as strong as he'd boasted and the bones in Peter's arm rubbed together painfully. Blunt fingers gouged into the tendons until Peter had all he could do not to cry out.

"You *know*, don't you?"

THE SURPRISE and pain had caught Peter off-guard. Fargo swore.

"How long have you known?" Each word was punctuated by a flexing of those implacable fingers in his arm. "D'you realize you done me out of \$15,000?" Just as Peter was certain Fargo was going to beat him, the man's attitude altered. "Okay, kid. I understand. You and your mother got scared after that Cadillac caper. Well, you don't have to be scared anymore. I said we'd be a team and we will. No one will think it funny when I find things. I'm a first-rate investigator to begin with. But with you . . . okay, where're the furs?"

"In the old lead mine." Peter

pointed toward the hills.

"We already searched there." Fargo's expression was suspicious. "You lead me on, kid . . ." and he raised his hand menacingly.

"The furs are hidden under the rubble in the old ore carts."

"How do you know? You seen 'em?"

"No, but that's where they are."

"You mean we walked up and down past 'em?"

If they were mice they would've bit you, Peter thought, coining one of his mother's off-cited phrases. Thinking of his mother gave him a second hold on his courage.

"The road to the mine's around here, isn't it?"

Peter told Fargo the way.

"Now you're using the old noggin, Petey boy." Cooperation made Fargo good-natured. "Say kid, how do you do it?"

"What?"

"No more of the innocent act." Fargo's voice took on a dangerous edge. "How do you find things you've never seen?"

"I can't always," Peter said, trying to sound dubious. "It's just when things are on people's minds a lot, like that Cadillac or the furs, I sort of get a picture of where they are. Sometimes the picture is clearer than other times, and I know the location."

"What's with the golf balls? You must've found hundreds of stupid golf balls these past couple'a months. Penny ate stuff—when I think of the lists of lost items on the company's records! I can make a fortune!"

Peter swallowed. "I", not the more diplomatic "we." The Mustang swerved up the last bend to the mine. "It's getting dark, Mister Fargo," Peter said. "We could come back tomorrow. We do have to find Victor

. . . don't we?"

"Forget the brat, Pete. I've got a flashlight. We'll look in that mine now." Fargo produced a huge hand-light and motioned with it for Peter to lead the way.

"The mine's dangerous, Mister Fargo. And the ore carts are pretty far down . . ."

There was no reprieve in Fargo's eyes. Peter led the way.

The walls were dripping with the recent spring thaws and the tunnel had a clammy chill as they penetrated slowly down, turning the gentle bend that led into the bowels of the mine.

"That's a new fall," Peter said nervously as they scrambled up over a soggy pile of mud.

Fargo shined the spot at the sagging supports. "Yeah, so let's get this caper over with. \$15,000 will do a lot for us, Petey boy. For you, your mother, and me."

"Why don't you just take the furs and leave us alone, Mister Fargo? It's not right for me to find things for money."

"Who says?" Fargo snorted at the altruism. "Like the old saying, Petey, 'losers weepers, finders keepers.' And, Petey boy, I'm the finder's keeper from now on."

The smile on Fargo's face chilled Peter worse than the tunnel's cold. But the smile disappeared when they both heard the groaning wood and the dribbling sound of dirt falling from a height.

"How much further? This place isn't safe."

The ore carts were right up against the old fall which had closed the mine. Fargo hoisted Peter into the first cart. The boy dug into the loose earth layering the cart, and Fargo swore as Peter unearthed the first of the plastic sacks. "They all that big?

I can't picture packing these up that tunnel." He heaved the plastic bags to the ground and the air puffed them up. "I bet I can get the Mustang down the tunnel." And he started off.

"Mister Fargo, would you leave the light here?" Peter cried.

Fargo turned, his smile malevolent in the dim light, for he kept the torch pointed forward. "What? A big kid like you afraid of the dark?" He laughed. "Just think of all the things \$15,000 will buy."

Peter watched with a rapidly increasing anxiety as the gleam of the spot disappeared around the bend, leaving him in a total blackout.

"Afraid of the dark?" The taunt frightened him not half as much as the life looming with shadowy certitude before him. Not all the warmth of the pelts on which he crouched could have thawed the fear in Peter's heart.

An ominous creak, almost overhead, startled him further. "The finder's keeper." Fargo had said. There were darker death traps than an old mine shaft, and bleaker lightless vistas.

Nonetheless Peter cried aloud when he saw the return of light and heard the sound of the Mustang bumping along the cart tracks.

"Okay, move your butt and haul these furs into the car, Petey. On the double."

Another warning rumble overhead and a gout of water from the support directly above the cars. Peter grabbed the plastic bags, tripping over the trailing length.

"Keep 'em off the wet ground, you stupid jerk. They're worth a fortune."

Peter muttered an apology as he crammed them into the trunk. The plastic refused to give up its supply of air and Fargo was cursing as he helped. Then he stormed down the

tunnel for more furs, dragging Peter with him. The light from the Mustang's headlights helped relieve the gloom, although its exhaust was a blue plume in the draughtless tunnel. Two loads and the trunk was full. Peter stood with an armload of plastic sacks wondering how they could possibly get them all in the sports car.

"Don't stand there, stupid. Dump 'em on the back seat."

That too was full shortly, so Peter heaved his next load onto the passenger seat, falling over it as he lost his balance. Accidentally he hit the wheel, and the horn. The noise startled Fargo into dropping his load but his curses were covered by a long low rumble. Mud and ooze rained down.

Peter screamed, gesturing frantically to the bulging overhead beam. Then, suddenly, he found himself stumbling over plastic bags, desperately pulling at Fargo's arm to get the man to move. Peter remembered scrambling and clawing through wet heavy mud. Then something struck him across the head.

HIS SKULL was on fire, his body rigid. Frightened, certain he was buried in the tunnel, he tried to move but his arms were held to his side. His fingers clawed but met fluffy soft warm blanketting. There was noise and confusion around him. He was aware of breathing fresh air, and yet . . . there was thudding and rumbling underneath him which echoed through his pain-filled head.

The mine had collapsed! But he was wrapped in a blanket. He was safe!

"Yeah, you wouldn't believe how fast that Mustang went in reverse. The surprising thing is I made it out

in one piece at all. 'Course the Company will see to the body work. All in the line of duty, Scortius! And I got what I went after. I found the furs."

"I" found the furs? Peter cringed at Fargo's fatuous statement.

"You got real luck, Fargo," Officer Scortius was saying enviously.

Fargo chuckled. "Real luck! Say doc, how long does it take that ambulance to get here? I want Petey boy given the best of care. I'll take care of the bill myself."

"The ambulance is coming," said Dr. Wingard and there was something in his voice that made Peter think that the doctor didn't much like Ken Fargo. "I'm just as anxious as you are about Peter's condition. I wan an X-ray of that skull . . ."

"I thought you said that was just a flesh wound?"

"There's a possibility of concussion . . ."

"Concussion?" Fargo sounded startled.

"Yes, it was a wound caused by a falling object. And I want to run an EKG. I don't like the sound of that heart."

"Heart?"

A fierce pounding in Peter's chest echoed the panic in Fargo's voice.

"Yes. Molly Kiernan's got enough on her mind, but I spotted an irregularity in Peter's heartbeat when I gave him a physical in school. Might be nothing. No mention of rheumatic fever on his school record . . ."

"Rheumatic fever?"

"I'm the cautious type. I'd just like to check."

"Oh."

Peter was somewhat encouraged by the dubious sound of Fargo's rejoinder. Then he remembered Jorie Favelly. She had a rheumatic heart and couldn't take gym and stayed out

of school in hard weather and was a real twerp. Be like her? Peter groaned.

"Hey, he's coming to," cried Fargo.

The air about Peter seemed to press in on him and he had a sense of suffocation. A hand grabbed his chin and shook him.

"Hey, Petey. Speak to me!"

There was a scuffle and an exclamation of surprise from Fargo.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Fargo, I'm the doctor." A firm hand turned back the blanket and found Peter's wrist. "And for your information, you don't shake the heads of concussion cases." Boy, was Dr. Wingard angry! "Peter? Peter? Can you hear me?" His voice was gentle again.

"Concussion." That word again. A series of associations in Peter's mind got linked to TV shows he'd seen. Maybe . . . As his mother liked to say, there were more ways to kill a cat than choking him with butter.

"Where am I?" He fluttered his eyelids like patients did at Dr. Kildaire. The act became real for the daylight was bright enough to hurt his eyes.

"Peter, it's Dr. Wingard. How're you feeling?"

"My head hurts."

"I know, boy. We'll soon fix that. Can you open your eyes again? And tell me how many fingers I'm holding up?"

Peter blinked. He could see that the doctor was holding up three fingers. He blinked again, made his eyes stay wide with fear.

"Who are you?" he asked, looking directly at the doctor as if he'd never seen him. Then he looked at Fargo. "Where am I?"

"How many fingers, Peter?"

"Fingers? Fingers?" Peter couldn't think how many he ought to see if he didn't see the right number. But he

could see the dawning of disappointed frustration and the fury of loss in Ken Fargo's face.

Losers weepers. Peter essayed a sob. After all, his head hurt—and he wasn't supposed to be as brave as Peter Kiernan.

"WHO ARE YOU? Where am I? My head hurts." But the first sob was abruptly followed by deep hurtful ones which Peter hadn't ordered.

"There there, boy. Take it easy. You'll be all right," said the doctor. He stood up, pulling Fargo aside. Peter strained his ears. "That head injury seems to be causing a little amnesia."

"Amnesia?"

"Oh, I don't think it's anything to worry about. A few weeks' rest in the hospital, a careful regime for a few months and he'll be right as rain."

"Amnesia? And a bum heart?" Fargo glanced sourly at Peter, who gave a weak groaning sob. "Look, doc. I've got to report to my Company about finding those furs. You just send the bills for the kid to Midwestern!"

"You'll be looking in on Peter?"

Peter kept his eyes tightly shut, but he was thinking with all his

strength: *Go away, Ken Fargo!*

Fargo cleared his throat and began moving away.

"Well now, I'll certainly try to. You let me know when he's completely recovered. If he gets his memory back. And check out that bad heart, too!"

Well, thought Peter, Petey boy just wouldn't recover ever from his amnesia. Not completely. And not that part of his mind that made him valuable to Fargo. *Finder's keeper, indeed!*

Weariness settled in along with pain and Peter closed his eyes. It was reassuring to hear little Victor blubbering. But what did he have to cry about? He was found, wasn't he?

Peter'd have to stop "finding" anything for a while. Even Mr. Roche's golfballs. But he could blame that on the crack on the head, too. He could still caddy. Then when he grew up, and without Mr. Ken Fargo interfering with him and his mother, why *he'd* become the toppest flight insurance investigator. And nobody would find it odd that he could find anything he wanted.

As his mother often said, it was an ill wind that blew nobody any good.

□



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NON-FICTION DEPARTMENT:

The second in our series of articles exploring the facts behind the mysteries of the supernatural. This issue, author Lin Carter presents some of the more recent discoveries in the age-old enigma of the "Lost Continent," in a piece he's titled . . .

DIGGING UP ATLANTIS

LIN CARTER



FOR something like twenty-three centuries now, the glittering and romantic legend of Atlantis the Lost Continent has teased and titillated the human imagination. Somewhere in the midst of the

unexplored Atlantic, beyond the Pillars of Hercules, the story goes, there once existed a superb island civilization whose culture had attained heights of scientific knowledge and spiritual wisdom yet un-

equalled by modern society. But that was long ago: the empire of the Atlanteans became wealthy, powerful and decadent; and in a single day and a night it was destroyed by the wrath of the gods and the continent sank forever beneath the foaming waves.

It is easy to see why this legend has fascinated Western civilization for so many generations, and why it continues to fascinate us today. For one thing, it's a great story; for another, it appeals to the romantic imagination most of us share. We like to daydream of a lost golden age, probably because today seems so dismal and gray. But—is it anything more than just a story? Is there any solid, factual evidence behind the legend, or is it, after all, just another daydream?

AS FAR as can be documented historically, the story was first set down by the Athenian philosopher, Plato, in two "dialogues" which he wrote towards the end of his life, about 355 B.C. (A dialogue is an extinct literary form, a sort of a short play without any action, in which the writer can argue both sides of a question by putting the various arguments pro and con in the mouths of different characters.) These two dialogues, called the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* after their most important characters, tell of an island civilization, luxurious, powerful and sophisticated, the center of a great maritime empire, ruled by the descendents of the hero-king, Atlas, who had been fathered by the god Poseidon upon a mortal woman. The Atlanteans had conquered much of North Africa and parts of Europe and warred against the men of Athens, until the gods became angry at their decadence and whelmed them with earthquake and flood. Plato does not really specify what it was the Atlanteans had done to incur the wrath of Olympus; one assumes church attendance had fallen off.

In presenting this information, Plato tricks it out with an attempt at documentation. Solon, the great lawgiver of earlier Athens, had been told the story by certain priests during a visit to Egypt, and made notes of the tale for an epic poem he thought he would like to write. In Plato's account, the story of Atlantis is narrated to Socrates and others by a fellow named Critias, to whose grandfather Solon had told the story.

Now, the question is: how much of all this could perhaps be fact, and how much is obviously fiction? Even at first glance, the story begins to sort itself into the two categories. No one today is likely to give any credence to the actual historical existence of Greek gods such as Poseidon, nor to claim they had power to destroy empires. That much, at least, must surely be pure myth. If such a civilization as Atlantis ever actually existed, it could only have been destroyed by a natural cataclysm. But whether or not Atlantis ever really existed is quite another question.

How much of Plato's account of how he got the story can we trust? Well, actually, there's no real reason to question any of it. Solon really lived (Plutarch wrote his biography) and he really did write poems (we have a few of them, although not the Atlantis epic). And Plutarch says he sojourned in Egypt for a time and "studied the mysteries" in the temples. Plutarch even records the names of the Egyptian priests from whom Solon heard the tale (Pshenophis of Heliopolis and Sonchis the Saite). And, in all fairness, it must be admitted that we do have independent corroboration of the Atlantis story from certain other ancient sources: the lost *Aethiopica* of Marcellus, according to Proclus, told of seven islands in the ocean of which one was sacred to Neptune (as the Romans called Poseidon); Aelian matter-of-factly discusses the kings and queens of ancient Atlantis; Diodorus of Sicily, in his

Library of History, gives us some information about Atlantis that cannot be found in Plato.

What about the sages and historians and geographers of Plato's own time and after—what was their opinion? Well, Crantor, who was the first scholar to write a commentary on Plato, regarded the story as pure history. The others, most of them, dismissed the account as mere fable, or were cautiously noncommittal. And it is probably worth noting again, that whatever the writers who came *after* Plato thought about the tale, no single writer who came *before* him so much as mentions a lost continent or submerged island or vanished civilization in the Atlantic. It is quite possible that he made the whole thing up. On the other hand, there just might be something in it.

THE OPINIONS of modern scientists on the story have been uniformly negative. Archaeologists ask, if Atlantis conquered North Africa and portions of Europe, where are the Atlantean ruins and remains, their monuments and inscriptions? We know the Romans conquered Gaul and Britain, and we can prove it, because we are still digging up Roman foundations, pavements, roads, frescoes, altars and inscriptions; but there are no Atlantean artifacts. The historians point out that it could not be possible for the Atlanteans to have warred with Athens in 9600 B.C., which is when Plato says the Egyptians said they did, for the simple reason that there weren't any Athenians around in those days, nor any Egyptians, either: we have a pretty good idea when Athens was founded, and it was a long time later than 9600 B.C. And the geologists tell us that while there certainly was a land-mass above the waves of the mid-Atlantic in ancient times, the times were considerably too ancient for a civilization of any kind to have flourished upon it. It was submerged during the Miocene,

which was twelve million years ago. End of story. **Almost!**

Suppose Plato or Critias or Solon or the Egyptians—or whoever—got it wrong. Suppose the island wasn't out in the mid-Atlantic at all, but closer to home. Suppose the civilization didn't fall ten thousand years ago, but considerably more recently. Let's move a few ages closer in time and a couple of thousand miles east, into the eastern part of the Mediterranean: what do we find?

We find, at the height of the Bronze Age, that half of the Mediterranean was dominated by an island civilization—rich, luxurious, sophisticated, also founded by a god who sired its first king on a mortal woman—a civilization which warred against the early Greeks (the Mycenaeans, they were called), and exacted an annual tribute of youths and maidens from them—a civilization known to have been in touch with the ancient Egyptians, because their artifacts and trade goods have been found in Egyptian tombs—a civilization, moreover, which came to a sudden and dramatic and very mysterious end, vanishing virtually in a day and a night, from "earthquake and deluge."

A civilization called Minoan Crete.

THE ASTONISHINGLY brilliant civilization of ancient Crete was very much like the descriptions of ancient Atlantis. Crete was a gigantic naval power, a maritime civilization that dominated the eastern end of the Mediterranean for about two thousand years. It was by far the most sophisticated civilization of the Bronze Age and very much advanced for its time; in fact, only in the last one hundred years or so has Western civilization caught up with certain of its accomplishments. (It had hot and cold running water and flush toilets, for instance.) By contrast with the highly civilized Minoans, the Greeks of the day were shaggy barbarians in wolf skins,

just beginning to fortify the heights of Athens and other places with rude stone castles. Greek myths, like that of Theseus, describe the yearly tribute the Minoans forced from the primitive Mycenaean tribes.

Then, very suddenly, and without warning, the empire of Crete simply vanished. The first archaeologists, digging up the remnants of ancient Cretan cities like Knossos, found superb stonework architecture, traces of an immense metropolis, brilliant and technically accomplished paintings, murals, mosaics. But they were unable to account for the sudden and complete destruction of so rich and powerful an empire; the buildings were toppled as though by an earthquake, and the ruins blackened as if by fire. But that was all they had to go on, and the utter collapse of the Cretan civilization remained mysterious and largely unexplained.

Knossos, the largest city of ancient Crete, is situated on the northern coast of the island. Directly north of this coast, only sixty miles away across open sea, lies a small, unimportant island formerly known as Santorini, the name being a corruption of "St. Irene," now better known as Thera. It's a volcanic island with a long history of eruptions, of which the earliest known took place in 197 B.C. and is mentioned in Strabo. The island resembles nothing so much as a cookie with a big bite out of it: a crescent, with a bay in the center of it and a couple little islets or reefs scattered beyond that bay where the edge of the circular island was originally.

Once, say the geologists, Thera was circular, with a huge volcanic mountain in the middle of it. But that was long ago ... say, about 3,500 years ago, way back in the Bronze Age, in the days of the early Mycenaeans ... say, about 1500 B.C., which is the approximate date of whatever it was caused Knossos to fall apart and brought the glittering civiliza-

tion of prehistoric Crete to a resounding downfall.

How big was the volcanic explosion that sunk the center of the island of Thera at about the same time the Minoan civilization came tumbling down? An oceanographer named James Mavor recently began looking into that question. While vacationing in Greece, a seismologist named Galanopoulos suggested to him that it might have been a truly titanic eruption, like that of Krakatoa in 1883, which was the biggest bang in history until Hiroshima was atom-bombed. Krakatoa is an island in the Sunda Strait between Sumatra and Java. When it blew up ninety years ago, clouds of dust and ash completely darkened the sky for a hundred miles around. The sky-splitting explosion broke windows and cracked walls up to a hundred and fifty miles away. Ash-clouds soared so high in the atmosphere that winds scattered them for a thousand miles, and the sound of the explosion itself, when the mountain broke apart, was so tremendous that it was heard for two thousand miles. When the island collapsed, the shock caused three successive tidal waves, fifty feet high and eighty miles long. Even though the island of Krakatoa was itself uninhabited, something like thirty-six thousand lives were lost in the cataclysm.

Suppose the explosion of the volcano on Thera had been comparable. The earth shock-wave could have shaken most of the buildings on Crete, only sixty miles south, to rubble; the tremendous clouds of scalding ash and pumice dust would have blanketed the streets, as happened much later at Pompeii when Vesuvius blew up; and tidal waves, travelling across empty seas, would have battered the entire coast of Crete with terrific impact, smashing to splinters the merchant fleets, the naval armadas, moored in their home ports. The destruction could easily have been so

devastating, that it could have taken decades or generations for the Minoans to have rebuilt their wrecked ships and fallen cities. (We know from history that, in fact, they never *did* rebuild them.)

Intrigued, Mavor launched an investigation. A respected younger figure in his own field, he wrote articles on the Thera eruption of 1500 B.C. for the technical journals, enlisted some interested fellow-scientists, among them a geophysicist named Zarudzki who was also on the staff of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute to which Mavor belongs. In 1965, Mavor organized the first of the two international expeditions to the Aegean he was to lead; Zarudzki, who had planned a cruise of the eastern Mediterranean in the Woods Hole research ship, *Chain*, invited Mavor and the others to join the *Chain* expedition for a side-trip to Thera. *Chain*, incidentally, is virtually a floating laboratory for oceanographic research, packed with the finest, most sophisticated scientific hardware money can buy, fully equipped to take deep-sea cores, electronic soundings of the sea bottom, and so on. They actually sailed *Chain* into the bay at the center of Thera, which had been formed when the volcano collapsed into the sea. After a preliminary oceanographic investigation with the sophisticated *Chain* apparatus, Mavor left the ship for some work on Thera itself. More scientists joined him there to search for possible Minoan antiquities and submerged ruins with some advanced technical gadgetry, including the experimental Edgerton "mud pinger," which was on loan to them from the Council of Underwater Archaeology. As well, the noted Greek archaeologist, Dr. Spyridon Marinatos, joined them on the island.

Chain's electronic study of the ocean's floor came up with hard evidence that the Bronze Age explosion had in fact been of Krakatoa-like proportions; to be precise, initial analysis of the

evidence suggested the eruption had been a couple of times bigger even than Krakatoa. The Thera archaeological search, too, came up with striking evidence to substantiate the theory: Minoan columns, pottery shards, walls, were found. A bit later, excavation began to unearth the ruins of palatial Cretan villas (or villa-like palaces, as you prefer). Sometime later, the expedition ran into problems during a Greek political feud, and Mavor himself was forced out of things, but Professor Marinatos stuck it out and has been directing a major archaeological dig on Thera ever since.

IN OCTOBER of 1972, newspaper stories began to break the veil of secrecy shrouding the Thera excavations; the *New York Times* for October 8, for example, carried an account of Marinatos' discoveries. A vast city is slowly coming to light at Akrotiri on the southern tip of the island, according to the *Times*. The immense metropolis was buried under a thick layer of volcanic ash. A series of small, brilliantly colored, exquisitely detailed frescoes, or wall-paintings, have been uncovered and are being pieced together by experts. They reveal rich stores of information about this mysterious, long-vanished civilization now generally believed to have been the original source of the great Atlantis myth. One fresco shows "a convoy of three or four ships, led by a fifty-oared flagship," the *Times* quotes Marinatos as saying; "another shows ships entering a busy port-town."

Are these glimpses of the great naval and maritime fleets that brought primal Atlantis to heights of fabulous power and glory? Are the careful tools of modern archaeologists slowly uncovering the ruins of the dazzling capitol of Lost Atlantis itself, that city of legend and romance the theosophists and occult scholars have long-since titled "the City of the Golden Gates"?

Only time with tell. But consider this: if the small isle of Thera, dominated by the soaring central cone of the immense volcano, was indeed the sacred capitol of the Atlantean Empire, the mystery of its name has been solved at last. For the smoking mountain, an active volcano, would have been crested by a mighty column of smoke, rising high in the sparkling, clear air of the Aegean, visible for scores of miles out to sea, dominating the scene. No wonder the ancient Greeks named it "the land of Atlantis"—*gaia Atlantis*, in their language, which means "Land of the Pillar."

And now we understand at last the secret of the mysterious cataclysm that destroyed the empire of the Atlanteans. Plato said the island sunk beneath the sea and was overwhelmed by "earthquake and deluge," and says nothing of a volcanic eruption. But Plato wrote his *Timaeus* and *Critias* twelve hundred years after the cataclysm destroyed Atlantis; the volcano itself had blown apart and sunk into the sea, together with a large chunk of the island. But the

Greeks of the time—and the Egyptians, for that matter—whichever of them it was who preserved the Atlantean history for Plato—all they could have known of the cataclysm was the earthquake and the tidal-wave, which followed the eruption. The explosion of the volcano itself was too far away for them to have seen it, although they must have heard the fantastic thunderblast when it blew up. (Thunderblast? . . . no wonder they ascribed the fall of Atlantis to the wrath of Zeus, king of the gods, and lightning-wielding god of the thunder!)

Professor Marinatos works on, his team of archaeologists slowly uncovering tangible evidence of the most famous of all the fantastic lost civilizations of the ages. It is impossible to guess what marvels he will unearth . . . the lost literature of Atlantis? . . . the myths and epics and histories of a forgotten age?

Perhaps the secret and awesome wisdom of a lost land, which has been famous in legend for twenty-three centuries, may yet come into our hands, as modern scientists dig up Atlantis itself.



Special Feature

Sometimes things just don't work out. You can plan for every contingency, watch every detail, and when it comes to the overall picture—you miss the most important element. So it was with "Neon," a short story by Herlen Ellison we ran in our first issue. What's that? you say. *Ran in your first issue?* But, good Lord, man—Isn't that "Neon" beginning on the following page? Well, we reply, it is . . . and it isn't.

For close to seven weeks George Effinger and I worked on the first issue of THE HAUNT OF HORROR, setting up the rather complex production peculiar to a digest magazine being published by a company which had had little experience in the prose magazine field. There were lawyers to talk to, artists to contact, schedules to write, advertising campaigns to outline, distribution problems to iron out, production difficulties to unsnerl—the thousand and one minor disasters which crop up in the initial days of putting out a new magazine. Concerned that our first issue should be the best we could produce, we poured over the galleys, correcting and recorrecting proofs; a dozen typos got past, but a hundred more were caught. At last we fell back with a collective sigh of relief. The issue went out to be pasted up; the pested up proofs came back; we corrected those for spelling and so on; those proofs went out; we were finished.

Three weeks later we received the first copies of the new magazine. Not bad, we said to ourselves. This idea here didn't work, but that one there came off marvelously. Some good, some bad. All in all, a satisfying first issue. We sent copies off to contributors and awaited their replies.

At two-thirty on a Sunday morning I received Herlen Ellison's reply; it came first as a shriek and then as a sob over a long-distance telephone call from California. Herlen was irete. With good reason.

You see, we'd reversed the last two pages of his story.

All those weeks of proofreading and copy-correcting had been in vain, because in all that time neither Effinger nor I noticed the mistake. Perhaps our error was a natural one—the ending as it appeared in our first issue seemed almost right; the last line was certainly a serviceable teg line. Still, we blew it. So here's our apology.

Herlen's story deserves a second chance, and we felt it was our place to give it that chance in these pages. Because we didn't want to disappoint you, our reader, with just a corrected reprint, we've given the story a new illustration and, with our new type, the story now takes up fewer pages than it did in its original incarnation. So, as we said in the beginning . . . this is "Neon," and it isn't. We hope you enjoy the story.

Wait until you see what we do next issue.

—G.C.

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

10/10/20

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NEW FILMS

TRULY CONCERNED whether or not he would live, the surgeons labored for many hours over Roger Charna. They cryogenically removed the pain areas in his anterior hypothalamic nucleus, and froze parts of him to be worked on later. Finally, it seemed they would be successful, and he would live. They bestowed on him three special gifts to this end: a collapsible metal finger, the little finger of the left hand; a vortex spiral of neon tubing in his chest, it glowed bright red when activated; and a right eye that came equipped with sensors that fed informational load from both the infrared and ultraviolet ends of the spectrum.

He was discharged from the hospital and tried to reestablish the life-pattern he'd known before the accident, but it was useless. Ruth's family had sent her abroad and he had the feeling she had been more than anxious to go. She could not have helped seeing the Sunday supplement piece on the operation. His employers at the apartment house had been pleasant, but they made good sense when they said as a doorman he was useless to them. They gave him a month's termination wages.

He had no difficulty getting another job, happily enough. The proprietors of a bookstore on Times Square felt he was a marvelous publicity item, and they hired him on the spot. He worked the seven o'clock to three a.m. shift, selling paperbacks and souvenirs to tourists and the theater crowd.

The first message he had from her was in the lightflesh of the *News-week* sign on the other side of 46th Street. He was sweeping out the front of the bookstore when he looked up and saw ROGER! UP HERE! ROGER! spelled out in the rapidly

changing lights. It spasmed and changed and became an advertisement for timely news. He blinked and shook his head. Then he saw the crimson spiral shining through his shirt, flickering on and off. There was a soft cotton candy feeling in his stomach. He swept the cigarette butts and dustballs furiously . . . out onto the sidewalk and across the sidewalk and into the gutter. He walked back to the bookstore, looking up and over his shoulder only as he stepped through the doorway. The sign was as he had always seen it before. Nothing strange there.

At his dinner break, he walked to the papaya stand near the corner of 42nd and Broadway and stood at the counter chatting with Caruso (which was not his name, but because he wanted to become an opera singer and went into the basement of the juice stand and sang arias from *Il Trovatore* and *I Pagliaci*, that was the name by which he was known).

"How do you feel?" Caruso asked him.

"Oh, I'm okay. I'm a little tired."

"You been to the doctor?"

"No. They said I didn't need to come around unless I hurt or something seemed wrong."

"You got to take care of yourself. You can't fool around with your health, yeah?" He was genuinely concerned.

"How're you?" Roger Charna asked. Caruso wrapped the semi-transparent square of serrated-edged paper around the hot dog and handed the bunned frank to him. Charna reached for the plastic squeeze-bottle of mustard.

"Couldn't be better," Caruso said. He drew off a large papaya juice and slid it across the counter. "I'm into Gilbert & Sullivan. *Pirates of Penzance*. I hear there's a big Gilbert &

Sullivan revival coming on."

ROGER CHARNA ATE without making a reply. He felt very sorry for Caruso. When he had first met him, the boy was not quite twenty, working at the stand, high hopes for a singing career. Now he was going to fat, his hair was thinning prematurely, and the dreams were only warm-bed whispers to impress the girls Caruso hustled off Times Square. It would come to nothing. Ten years from now, should Roger come back, he knew Caruso would still be there, singing in the basement, pulling 25 cent slices of pizza from the big Grimaldi oven, filling the sugar jars, carrying cases of Coke syrup downstairs to be stored, the dreams losing their color, gravity pulling it all down.

Then he realized he might still be on Times Square, ten years from now. The pity backed up in its channel and washed over him.

The 7-Up sign winked once and began pulsing. His chest spiral picked up the beat. Pain hit him. Roger looked up and the sign was flickering on and off. His chest spiral had changed color, now pulsed deep blue in synch with the 7-Up sign, right through his shirt. The girl on the sign moved smoothly and directly to stare down at him. Her mouth began moving. Roger Charna could not read lips.

"Caruso." The counterman turned from re-loading the hot dog broiler and smiled. "Huh?" Roger pointed across the street, up at the 7-Up sign. "Take a look over there and tell me what you see." Caruso moved to the end of the counter and stared up. "What?" Roger pointed to the sign. "The sign, the 7-Up sign." Caruso looked again. "What am I supposed to see?" Roger sighed and finished his

hot dog. "I think I'll go see the doctor tomorrow morning."

"You got to take care of yourself. You been a very sick guy, yeah?"

Roger nodded and laid out the coins in payment for the dog and papaya. Caruso pushed them back with the heel of his hand. "Iss onna house." Roger found himself still nodding.

The coins back in his pants pocket, he walked up Broadway to the bookstore, wishing the *New York Times* still had its neon newsservice on the island at 42nd Street.

It might all come clear if whoever was trying to reach him had free access to unlimited language.

By this time Roger knew either someone was trying to talk to him, or he was going insane. Odds were bad.

He was invited to a party. He went because they asked him. He paid a dollar at the door: a woman who had had her left breast removed for what he found out later were carcinogenic reasons, took the money. She was topless; she smiled a great deal. He also discovered, later in the evening, that these people had answered an advertisement in an underground newspaper. It had been headed with a photograph from Tod Browning's *Freaks*—pinhead twins joined at the rump. Roger did not feel at ease with them:

In the group was a man who sought carnal knowledge of blimps. He had been arrested three times for trying to *shtup* the Goodyear dirigible. Even among his own kind he was looked on with distaste; unable to find the species of sex partners his pathology demanded, he had grown steadily more perverted and had taken to attacking helicopters; the mere mention of an autogyro gave him a noticeable erection.

He was offered a sloe gin fizz in a

pink frosted glass by a young woman who removed her glass eye and sucked on it while discussing the moral imperatives of the sponge boycott in Brooksville, Florida. She rolled the eye around on her tongue and Roger walked away quickly.

"The dollar was for the spaghetti," explained a man with a prosthetic arm and a leather cone where his nose should have been. "My wife would have told you about that when she invited you, because you're a celebrity and we certainly don't want to charge you, but if we made an exception, well, everyone would want the dollar back. But you can have as much spaghetti as you want." He pulled the cone forward on its elastic band and scratched at the raw, red scar-tissue beneath. "Actually, I'll tell you what: come on in the bathroom for a couple of minutes and I can slip the buck back to you, they'll never know." Roger slipped sideways around a bookcase and left the man scratching.

THE ROOM WAS RATHER NICE, large and airy, filled with kinetic sculptures and found object constructs that covered the walls and dominated the floor space. There were half a hundred light paintings of bent neon tubing and fluorescent designs. They looked expensive. Roger wondered why his dollar was necessary.

Seven people were seated at the feet of a moon-faced woman perched on a three-legged aluminum stool. The entire left side of her face was blotched with a huge strawberry birthmark. She had a coatimundi on her shoulder; it was nibbling leaves of lettuce she had safety-pinned to her dress like epaulets.

A man who bore a startling resemblance to a plucked carrion bird,

snagged Roger's arm as he moved toward the front door. He stammered hideously. "Uh . . . uh . . . uh . . ." he babbled, till something snapped in his right cheek and he launched into a convoluted diatribe that began with a confession of his having been defrocked as a molecular biologist, veered insanely through a recitation of the man's affection for Bermuda shorts, and reached a far horizon at which he said, with eyes rolling: "Now everybody doesn't know this," and he pulled Roger closer, "but the universe, the entire frigging universe is going to collapse around everyone's ears in just seventy-two billion years. I smoke a lot."

Roger skinned loose, and turning, thumped against a dwarf who had been surreptitiously trying to look up the skirt of a young woman with a hairlip. "Excuse me," Roger said, assisting the dwarf to his feet. He brushed him off and started to move, but the dwarf had thrown both arms around Roger's leg. "They remaindered me," the dwarf said, rather pathetically. "Before, I swear before the damned book had a chance, they remaindered me. Can you perceive the pain, the exquisite pain of being carried into Marboro's on Third and seeing a stack, a virtual, a veritable, I mean motherGod a phallic Annapurna mountain of copies of the finest, what I mean the sincerest study of the anopheles mosquito ever written. That book was a work of love, excuse me for using the word but I mean to say *ardor*; and those butchers at Doubleday, those mau-maus, my God, they're vivisectionists, for Pete's sake . . . if he were alive today, Ferdinand deLesseps would absolutely *whirl* in his grave."

"I have to go to the bathroom,"

Roger said, trying to pry his leg loose. The dwarf unwound and sat there looking frayed. Roger smiled self-consciously and moved away. He started back for the door.

Everything dropped into the ultra-violet.

The little finger of his left hand began to resonate with the tinny voice of Times Square Caruso hashing out *I'm Called Little Buttercup* as the neon spiral in his chest gave him a shock and began flickering in gradually bloodier shades of crimson. Caruso segued into Kurt Weill's *Pirate Jenny*, a tune Roger was certain the papaya juice stand attendant had never heard.

The ultra-violet smelled purple; it sounded like the nine-pound hammers of Chinese laborers striking the rails of the Union Pacific Railroad; it sprang out as auras and halos and nimbuses around everyone in the room; Roger clutched his chest.

His eyes rolled up in his head and the images burned there like the braziers of Torquemada's dungeons. He blinked and his eyes rolled down again bringing with them images as burning bright as the crosses of Ku Klux Klansmen in Selma, Alabama: it was all in his right eye. He feared what lay ahead in the infrared. But that never happened; it was all in the ultra-violet.

THE ROOM BURNED around the edges, deep purple and a kind of red that he realized—with some embarrassment—matched up only with the red just inside the slit in the head of his penis during his recurring bouts with prostatitis. Every neon sculpture and fluorescent painting in the room was jangling at him. A half a hundred roadsigns to someone who was trying to talk to him. *I believe*

I'm a closet psychotic, he thought, but nothing stopped.

The neon tubes on the walls writhed with the burning edges of the soft-boiled sun as it bubbled down into the black horizon. They reformed and slopped color words of pink and vermilion across the airy walls.

ROGER, YOU'RE MAKING IT MURDER TO GET THROUGH TO YOU.

He tried running but all the movement was inside his skin; none of it got to the outside.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU PREFER THE COMPANY OF THESE DISGUSTING PERVERTS. LOOK, I LOVE YOU, THAT'S THE LONG, THE SHORT AND THE COLOR OF IT, ROGER. WHAT SAY?

His metal little finger was singing the bell song from *Lakme* and he hated it. His chest spiral was bubbling and he had the immediate fear his shirt would catch fire. All the women in the room were frozen in place, their hair vibrating like cilia, each strand standing up and away individually, emitting purple sparks like St. Elmo's Fire. The men looked like X-rays of rickets cases.

"Who are you?" Roger said in a choked voice.

I THOUGHT YOU'D NEVER ASK. I'M THE RIGHT WOMAN FOR YOU. GOD KNOWS YOU'VE HAD A CRUMMY TIME OF IT, AND I'M SENT TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR YOU. IT'S THE REAL LOVE YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR, ROGER.

"Where are you?"

RIGHT HERE. IN THE LIGHTS.

"I'm going to be sick."

RIGHT HERE. COME ON, ROGER, JUST FIRM UP NOW!

"Haven't I suffered enough already?"

ROGER, SELF-PITY JUST WON'T GET IT. IT'S TRUE YOU'VE SUFFERED, AND THAT'S WHY YOU WIN THE LOTTERY OF LOVE WITH ME, BUT YOU'VE GOT TO STOP BEING MAUDLIN ABOUT IT.

"Not only am I a put-together thing, a righteous freak, but now I'm going completely insane."

ROGER, WILL YOU HAVE A LITTLE TRUST, FOR GOD'S SAKE? I'M PART OF THE REPAYMENT FOR WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU. ALL IT TAKES IS BELIEF AND A COUPLE OF STEPS.

He felt his right hand groping in the empty air around his right side—while his left hand sang *Pace Mio Dio* from *La Forza Del Destino*—and he came up with an aquamarine Italian marble egg.

"Listen, I think you're terrific," Roger said, playing for time.

YOU'RE PLAYING FOR TIME.

She's on to me, Roger thought desperately. He flung the Italian marble egg at the neon wall-sculptures, it struck, geysers of sparks erupted, a curtain caught fire, a woman's dress went up in a puff of Gucci, people began shrieking, the ultra-violet dissipated in an instant, everything returned to normal, Roger was scared out of his mind . . . and he ran out of there as fast as he could.

His finger had grown hoarse, and finally shut up.

ROGER CALLED IN SICK and begged off work for a few days. They were understanding, but the big Labor Day weekend was coming up, they'd laid in a large stock of Sicilian switchblades and copies of the steamier works of Akbar Del Piombo and Anonymous in the *Travelers' Companion* series, and they ex-

pected him—neon coil, weird eye and metal finger included—on the ready line when the marks, kadodies and reubens fresh from Michigan's Ionia State Fair descended on sinful Times Square. Roger mumbled various okays and went for extended walks along the night-hot Hudson River Drive.

The big Spry sign blinking across the Hudson from Jersey caught his eye.

YOU ARE THE DAMNEDEST, MOST OBSTINATE HUMAN BEING I HAVE EVER ENCOUNTERED, said the Spry sign, forming words it was clearly incapable of forming.

Roger began running . . . blindly along the breakwater. The sign gave him no peace. It continued jabbering at him. ROGER! FOR CRINE OUT LOUD, ROGER, WILL YOU STOP JUST A MOMENT AND LISTEN TO ME!

He ran up West 114th Street, stumbling over a gentleman of the evening who was lying half in, half out of the doorway of an apartment building. Roger excused himself and would have waited for a response to make sure he had not damaged the fellow, but the man had somehow gotten his tongue stuck deep inside the neck of an empty Boone's Farm Apple Wine bottle, and speech was beyond him.

Roger grabbed an IRT express downtown, and sitting in the clattering hell of a subway car he tried to ignore the overhead fluorescents that babbled I'M TRYING TO SAVE YOUR SOUL, YOU CLOWN. I'M IN LOVE WITH YOU. ARE YOU BEING ASSAULTED BY LOVE EVERY DAY SO MUCH YOU CAN TURN DOWN A TERRIFIC OFFER LIKE THIS?

Roger closed his eyes. It didn't

help. His chest coil was obviously activated and it was pulsing in time with the overheads. He opened his eyes and with a sudden weariness that swept over him like a sea of sand he opened his mouth and gave a primal scream. No one in the subway car noticed.

He got out on Times Square and, of course, she was everywhere. In the signs of the sea food restaurant on the other side of 42nd Street, in the marquees of the skin film theaters, in the neon of the pornobook shops, in every flashing, bubbling, flickering, hallucinating light that made up the visual pollution by which Times Square proclaimed its wares and snagged its victims.

"Okay!" he howled, standing in the middle of the sidewalk as the mobs split around him. "Okay! I quit! I've had enough! I give up! Name it, just name it, I'll do it! I've had the course! I'm only human and I've had it!"

TERRIFIC! AT LONG LAST! said the neon come-ons. THERE'S A LADDER OVER THERE BY THAT MOVIE, SEE IT?

Roger looked and, yes, there was a twenty-foot ladder up under the marquee of a movie house playing a double bill comprised of LEATHER LOVERS and REBECCA OF SINNYBROOK FARM. "Now what?" Roger said, softly.

I CAN'T HEAR YOU the neon replied.

"I said: what the hell now you goddam pain in the ass!" he screamed, at the highest decibel count he had ever achieved, his throat going raw. People shied away.

CLIMB UP THE LADDER, YOU SWEET THING.

"Oh, God," Roger mumbled, "this is just terrible; just terrible. I hate this a lot."

But he climbed the ladder, just as the assistant manager of the theater—a zit-laden young man in a soiled tuxedo and argyle socks—emerged from the lobby carrying the heavy boxes of marquee letters to change the bill. "Hey! Hey, you! Weirdo, what the gadham flop hell you think you're doin'? Get offa there you freako-devo-pervert!"

Roger went up and up, and when he was standing at the top he was level with the neon theater name. It said, very suddenly, TAKE ME! TAKE ME NOW!

AND FOR NO PARTICULAR REASON Roger could name, he reached out with both hands, swung himself onto the marquee, and—ripping open his shirt so his coil was exposed—he slammed himself against the love-message.

There was a blinding flash of light that pulsed and continued flashing like endless novae, over and over and over resembling—said a narcotics squad cop who had worked on the ski patrol at Stowe, Vermont—who happened to be emerging from the theater handcuffed to two Queens junkies he'd caught scoring in the highest row of the balcony—resembling nothing so much as the sunlight glassflashing off the thin crust of ice over powder at the summit of a snowcovered mountain.

Someone else said it was the exact color of tuna fish salad.

But when the light faded, Roger Charna was gone, all save the little finger of his left hand, lying on the sidewalk humming a medley of tunes from *The Student Prince*, *Blossom Time* and *The Desert Song*, a very peculiar eyeball that seemed to have developed a terrible case of glaucoma, and a dollar and thirty-five cents in change.

Someone else said it was the exact color of the cardboard they used to reinforce his shirts when they came from the Chinese hand laundry.

And one thing more.

Every neon sign in Times Square had a new color added to its spectrum. It seemed to reside somewhere between silver and orange, bled off into the ultra-violet and the infrared at one and the same time, had tinges of vermilion at the top and jade at the bottom, and resembled no other color ever seen by human eyes. The color sounded like a Louisville slugger connecting solidly with a hardball in that special certain way that produces a line drive high into the right center bleachers. It smelled like a forest of silver pines just after the rain, with scents of camomile, juniper, melissa and mountain gentian thrown in. It felt like the flesh of a three-week-old baby's instep. It tasted like lithograph ink, but there are people who *like* the taste of lithograph ink.

Someone said it was the exact color of caring.

ON ANOTHER PLANE OF EXISTENCE, where things were vastly different from those in the world that had given Roger Charna his neon chest spiral, observations were made and the new color was seen.

"There it is," they said.

"Yep, there it is," they said.

"Took them long enough," they said.

"Well, now that they're ready we can go and show them how to do it," they said.

"They're going to like this," they said.

"A lot," they said.

And they set out immediately, and it took no time at all to get there, and when they arrived they changed everything and everyone enjoyed it a lot.

And everyone said the angels were the exact color of charna, which wasn't a bad name for it at all. □



Authors' Page

DENNIS O'NEIL, author of this issue's lead story, "Devil Night," is an author of growing stature in the science fiction community. As mentioned in our last issue, Denny's stories have appeared in **Fantasy and Science Fiction**, **Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine**, **Amazing** and **Fantastic**, and **Mike Shayne's Mystery Magazine**. A well-anthologized author, Denny is working on his third book; previous books have included a history of Presidential elections, and a science fiction novel. "Devil Night" is part of a series of stories Denny is writing about a mythical Missourian town; other stories in the series are "Mister Cheribum," "Report on a Broken Bridge," the latter of which appeared in an anthology of best mystery stories edited by Ellery Queen. Among his other activities, Mr. O'Neil has been a newspaperman, an editor, a screenwriter, and an author of comic book scripts for such titles as **Batman**, **Superman**, **Green Lantern/Green Arrow**, and **Swords of Sorcery**.

LIN CARTER, in charge of our Non-Fiction Department this time around, began his career as a student of fantasy fiction, establishing a firm reputation as a knowledgeable and entertaining writer of scholarly non-fiction. As time progressed, Lin also developed a reputation as a first-class author of fantasy fiction as well, i.e.: his popular **Thongor** series, as well as his work with L. Sprague de Camp in continuing the legend of **Conan**. Not one to rest on his laurels, Lin struck out into a third career—that of editor of fantasy fiction, produc-

ing a line of well-received Fantasy Classics for Ballantine. Throughout it all, Lin never lost his love for study—with the result that when we asked him to do a regular column of non-fiction dealing with the facts behind the supernatural, Lin readily agreed. "Digging Up Atlantis" is the first of such articles. Among his most recent books are: **Lovecraft: A Look Behind the Cthulhu Mythos** (Ballantine Books); **Conan the Buccaneer**, with L. Sprague de Camp (Lancer Books); and **New Worlds for Old**, editor (Ballantine Books). A pretty fair spread for one man.

ARTHUR BYRON COVER, a new name to horror fiction, is the author of "Pelican's Claws." Re: his background, Art Cover has this to say: "I was born 1/14/50 in Grundy, Virginia; when I was four my parents moved to Tazewell, Va., and the Health Department in "Pelican's Claws" is based on the one my father works for in Virginia, and Blackton County is Tazewell County. So in that respect "Pelican's Claws" is autobiographical. I have sold stories to Harlan Ellison's upcoming anthology, **INFINITY FIVE**, and **SIX**, **THE ALIEN CONDITION**, the David Gerrold books, and **ETERNITY** magazine. To keep alive I have a job as a short-order cook." If Arthur continues to write stories like the one in this issue, we've no doubt he'll soon only have to cook for himself.

FRITZ LEIBER was featured in our last issue, so we won't run through his biography again; we'll simply remind you that Fritz's award-winning novel, **THE WANDERER**, has been re-released by Ballantine

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the behavior of a single electron, with all its whims and impulses, though electrons in the aggregate obey relatively simple laws, just as human beings do when considered as crowds. The same holds true of the basic entities of magic, and to a much greater degree.

"It is partly for this reason that magical processes are so unreliable and dangerous, and why their working can be so readily impeded if the intended victim is on guard against them—as your formulas have to our knowledge been nullified since Mrs. Gunnison stole your notebook."

His words possessed for him an incredibly strange overtone. But it was only by maintaining a dry, scholarly manner that he could keep going. He knew that if he permitted himself to be casual, mental confusion would engulf him.

"THERE REMAINS one all-important consideration," he went on swiftly. "Magic appears to be a science which markedly depends on its environment—that is, the situation of the world and the general conditions of the cosmos at any particular time. For example, Euclidean geometry is useful on Earth, but out in the greath depths of space a non-Euclidean geometry is more practical. The same is true of magic, but to a more striking degree. The basic, unstated formulas of magic appear to change with the passage of time, requiring frequent restatement—though it might conceivably be possible to discover master-formulas governing that change. It has been speculated that the laws of physics show a similar evolutionary tendency—though if they do evolve, it is at a much less rapid rate than those of magic. For example, it is believed that the speed of light may slowly

change with its age. It is natural that the laws of magic should evolve more swiftly, since magic depends on a contact between the material world and another level of being—and that contact is complex and may be shifting rapidly.

"Take astrology, for example. In the course of several thousand years, the precession of equinoxes has put the Sun into entirely different celestial houses—signs of the Zodiac—at the same times of year. A person born, say, on March 22nd, is still said to be born in Aries, though he is actually born when the Sun is in the constellation Pisces. A failure to take into consideration this change since the formulas of astrology were first discovered, has rendered the formulas obsolete and invalidated them for—"

"It is my belief," the voice broke in, like a phonograph suddenly starting, "that astrology has always been largely invalid. That it is one of the many pretended sciences which have been confused with true magic and used as a kind of window dressing. Such is my belief."

"I presume that may be the case, and it would help to explain why magic itself has been outwardly discredited as a science—which is the point I am getting at.

"Suppose the basic formulas of physics—such as Newton's three laws of motion—had changed several times in the last few thousand years. The discovery of any physical laws at any time would have been vastly difficult. The same experiments would give different results in different ages. But that is the case with magic, and explains why magic has been periodically discredited and become repugnant to the rational mind. It's like what old Carr was saying about the run of cards at

bridge. After a few shuffles of a multitude of cosmic factors, the laws of magic change. A sharp eye can spot the changes, but continual experimentation, of the trial-and-error sort, is necessary to keep the crude practical formulas of magic in anything like working order, especially since the basic formulas and the master-formulas have never been discovered.

"Take a concrete example—the formula I used Sunday night. It shows signs of recent revision. For instance, what did the original, unrevised formula have in place of the phonograph needle?"

"A willow whistle of a certain shape, which had been blown only once," the voice told him.

"And the platinum or iridium?"

"The original formula mentioned silver, but a heavier metal serves better. Lead, however, proved altogether ineffective. I tried it once. It was apparently too unlike silver in other respects."

"Precisely. Trial-and-error experimentation. Moreover, in the absence of thorough investigation, we cannot be sure that all the ingredients of a magic formula are essential in making it work. A comparison of the magic formulas of different countries and peoples would be helpful in this respect. It would show which ingredients are common to all formulas and therefore presumably essential, and which are not essential."

There was a discreet knock at the door. Norman spoke a few words, and the figure drew down its veil and turned toward the window, as if staring stolidly at the passing fields. Then he opened the door.

It was lunch, as long in coming as breakfast had been. And there was a new face—coffee-colored instead of

ebony. Evidently the first waiter, who had shown growing nervousness in his previous trips to the compartment, had decided to let someone else get the big tip.

With a mixture of curiosity and impatience, Norman waited for the reactions of the newcomer. He was able to predict most of them. First a very quick inquisitive glance past him at the seated figure—Norman guessed they had become the major mystery of the train. Then a longer, sideways glance while setting up the folding table, ending with the eyes getting very wide; he could almost feel the coffee-colored flesh crawl. Only hurried, almost unwilling glances after that, with a growing uneasiness manifested in clumsy handling of the dishes and glassware. Then a too-pleasant smile and a hasty departure.

Only once Norman interfered—to place the knives and forks so they lay at right angles to their usual position.

The meal was a very simple one, almost ascetic. He did not look across the table as he ate. There was some thing worse than animal greediness about that methodical feeding. After the meal he settled back and started to light a cigarette, but—

"Aren't you forgetting something?" the figure said. The question was uninflected.

He roused himself, got up and put the left-overs into a small cardboard box, covered them with a napkin he had used to wipe the dishes clean, and placed the box in his suitcase beside an envelope containing clippings from his own fingernails. The sight of the clean breakfast dishes had been one of the things which had helped to disturb the first waiter, but Norman was determined to adhere strictly to all taboos that Tansy seemed to desire.

So he collected food fragments, saw to it that no knives or other sharp instruments pointed toward himself or his companion, had them sleep with their heads nearest the engine and their destination, and enforced a number of other minor regulations. Eating in private satisfied still another taboo, but there was more than one reason for that.

He glanced at his watch. Only half an hour until Hempnell. He had not realized they were so close. There was the faint sense of an almost physical resistance from the region ahead, as if the air were thickening. And his mind was tossing with a multitude of problems yet to be considered.

DELIBERATELY TURNING his back, he said, "According to the myths, souls may be imprisoned in all sorts of ways—in boxes, inknots, in animals, in stones. Have you any ideas on this subject?"

As he feared, this particular question brought the usual response. The answering words had the same dull insistence as when he had first heard them.

"I want my soul."

His hands, clasped in his lap, tightened. This was why he had avoided the question until now. Yet he had to know more, if that were possible.

"But where exactly should we look for it?"

"I want my soul."

"Yes." It was hard for him to control his voice. "But how, precisely, might it be hidden? It would help if I knew."

There was rather a long pause. Then, in robot-imitativeness of his lecture manner: "The environment of the soul is the human brain. If it is free, it immediately seeks such an environment. It may be said that

soul and body are two separate creatures, living together in a symbiotic relationship so intimate and tight that they normally seem to be only one creature. The closeness of this contact appears to have increased with the centuries. Indeed, when the body it is occupying dies, the soul is usually unable to escape and appears to die too. But by supernatural means the soul may sometimes be divorced from the body it is occupying. Then, if it is prevented from re-entering its own body, it is irresistibly drawn to another, whether or not that other body possesses a soul. And so the captive soul is usually imprisoned in the brain of its captor and forced to view and feel, in complete intimacy, the workings of that soul. Therein lies perhaps its chief torment."

Beads of sweat prickled Norman's scalp and forehead.

His voice did not shake, but it was unnaturally heavy and sibilant as he asked, "What is Evelyn Sawtelle like?"

The answer sounded as if it were being read verbatim from the summary of a political dossier.

"She is dominated by a desire for social prestige. She spends most of her time in unsuccessfully attempting to be snobbish. She has romantic ideas about herself, but since they are too high-flown for any reasonable chance of satisfaction, she is prim and moralistic, with rigid standards of conduct. She believes she was cheated in her husband, and is always apprehensive that he will lose what ground she has gained for him. Being unsure of herself, she is given to acts of maliciousness and sudden cruelty. At present she is very frightened and constantly on guard. This is why she had her magic all ready when she received the

telephone call."

Norman asked, "Mrs. Gunnison—what do you think of her?"

"She is a woman of abundant vigor and appetites. She is a good housewife and hostess, but those activities hardly take the edge off her energies. She should have been mistress of a feudal domain. She is a born tyrant and grows fat on it. Her appetites, many of them incapable of open satisfaction in our present society, nevertheless find devious outlets. Servant girls of the Gunnisons have told stories, but not often, and then guardedly, for she is ruthless against those who are disloyal to her or threaten her security."

"And Mrs. Carr?"

"Little can be said of her. She is conventional, an indulgent ruler of her husband, and enjoys being thought sweet and saintly. Yet she hungers for youth. It is my belief that she became a witch in middle age and therefore feels a deep frustration. I am uncertain of her deeper motivations. Curiously little of her mind shows above the surface."

Norman nodded. Then he nerved himself. "What," he asked quickly, "do you know of the formulas for regaining a stolen soul?"

"Very little. I had a large number of such formulas jotted down in the note book Mrs. Gunnison stole. I had the shadowy idea of working out a safe guard against some possible attack. But I do not remember them and I doubt if any of them work. I have never tried them, and in my experience formulas never work at the first attempt. They must always be refined by trial and error."

"But if it were possible to compare them, to find the master formula underlying them all, then—?"

"Perhaps."

There was a knock. It was the

porter come for the bags.

"Be in Hempnell in five minutes, sir. Shall I brush you in the corridor?"

Norman tipped him, but declined the service. He also told him they would carry their own bags. The porter smiled jerkily and backed out.

Norman crossed to the window. For a moment there was only the giddily-whirring gravel wall of a gully and dark trees flashing indistinctly above. But then the gravel wall gave way to a wide panorama, as the tracks swung around and down the hillside.

There was more woodland than field in the valley. The trees seemed to encroach on the town, dwarfing it. From this particular point it looked quite tiny. But the college buildings stood out with a cold distinctness. He fancied he could make out the window of his office.

Those cold gray towers and darker roofs were like an intrusion from some other, older world, and his heart began to pound, as if he had suddenly sighted the fortress of the enemy.

CHAPTER XVII

SUPPRESSING THE impulse to slink, Norman rounded the corner of Morton, squared his shoulders, and forced himself to look across the campus. The thing that hit him hardest was simply the air of normality. True, he had not consciously expected Hempnell to manifest any physical stench of evil, any outward sign of poisonous inward neurosis—or whatever it was he was battling. But this abnormal, story-book wholesomeness—the little swarms of students trooping back to the dormitories and over to the soda fountain at Student Union, the file of girls in white bound for a tennis lesson,

the friendly familiar look of the wide walks—it struck at the very core of his mind, as if deliberately trying to convict him of insanity.

"Don't fool yourself," his thoughts told him. "Some of those laughing girls are already infected, with something. Their very respectable mammas have given them delicate hints about all sorts of unusual ways of Making Wishes Work. They already know that there's more to neurosis than the psychiatry books tell and that the economics texts don't even scratch the surface of the Magic of Money. And it certainly isn't chemistry formulas they're memorizing when that faraway look comes into their eyes as they sip their cokes or chatter about their boy friends."

He turned into Morton and quickly mounted the stairs.

His capacity for surprise was not yet exhausted, however, as he realized when he saw a group of students emerging from the classroom at the other end of the third-floor corridor. He glanced at his watch and realized that it was one of his own classes dispersing after having waited ten minutes—the usual tardy professor's grace—for him to appear. That was right, he reminded himself, he was Professor Saylor, a man with classes, committee meetings, and appointments. He slipped around the bend in the corridor before he was noticed.

After standing in front of the door for a few minutes, he entered his office. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed, but he was careful in his movements and on the alert for unfamiliar objects. He did not put his hand into any drawer without closely inspecting it first.

One letter in the little pile of accumulated mail was important. It

was from Pollard's office, ominously requesting him to appear at a meeting of the trustees later that week. He smiled with grim satisfaction at this evidence that his career was still skidding downhill.

He methodically removed certain sections from his files, stuffed his brief cases full, and made a package of the remainder.

After a last glance around, during which he noted that the Estrey dragon had not been restored to whatever had been its original position on the roof, he started downstairs.

Outside he met Mrs. Gunnison.

He was acutely conscious of the way his arms were encumbered. For a moment he did not seem able to see the woman clearly.

"Lucky I found you," she began immediately. "Harold's been trying every which way to get in touch with you. Where have you been?"

Suddenly she registered on him as her old, blunt, sloppy self. With a sense of mingled frustration and relief, he realized that the warfare in which he was engaged was a strictly undercover affair, and that outwardly all relationships were the same as ever. He found himself explaining how Tansy and he, week-ending with friends out in the country, had gotten a touch of food poisoning, and how his message to Hempnell must have gone astray. This lie, planned some time ago, had the advantage of providing a reason for Tansy's appearance if any one should see her, and it would enable him to plead a recurrence of the attack as an excuse for neglecting his academic duties.

He did not expect Mrs. Gunnison to believe the lie, still he ought to be consistent.

She accepted the story without comment, offered her sympathies

and went on to say, "But be sure and get in touch with Harold. I believe it has to do with that meeting of the trustees you've been asked to attend. You know, Harold thinks a great deal of you. Good-by."

He watched her puzzledly as she tramped off. Odd, but at the last moment he fancied he caught a note of genuine friendliness in her manner, as if for a moment something that was not Mrs. Gunnison had appealed to him out of her eyes.

But there was work to do. Off campus, he hurried down a side street to where his car was parked. With hardly a side wise glance at the motionless figure in the front seat, he stepped in and drove to Sawtelle's.

The house was bigger than they needed, and the front lawn was very formal. But the grass was yellow in patches, and the soldierlike rows of flowers looked neglected.

"Wait here," he said. "Don't get out of the car under any circumstances."

To his surprise, Hervey met him at the door. There were circles under Hervey's always-worried eyes, and his fidgetiness was more than usually apparent.

"I'm so glad you've come," he said, pulling Norman inside. "I don't know what I'm going to do with all these departmental responsibilities on my shoulders. Classes having to be dismissed. Stop-gap instructors to be obtained. And the deadline on next year's catalogue tomorrow! Here, come into my study." And he pushed Norman through a huge living room, expensively but stiffly furnished, into a dingy, book-lined cubby-hole with one small window.

"I'm almost going out of my mind. I haven't dared stir out of the house since Evelyn was attacked Saturday

night."

"What!"

"Haven't you heard?" He stopped and looked at Norman in surprise. Even here he had been trying to pace up and down, although there was not room enough. "Why, it was in the papers, I wondered why you didn't come over or call up. I kept trying to get you at your home and the office, but no one could locate you. Evelyn's been in bed since Sunday, and she gets hysterical if I even speak of going out of the house. Just now she's asleep, thank heavens."

HASTILY NORMAN related his trumped-up excuse. He wanted to get back to what had happened Saturday night. As he glibly mouthed his lie about food poisoning, his mind jumped to Bay port and the telephone call to Evelyn Sawtelle that had occurred late on that same Saturday night. Only then Evelyn had seemed to be attacking, not attacked. He had come here to confront her. But now—

"Just my luck!" Sawtelle exclaimed tragically when Norman had finished. "The whole department falling apart the very first week I'm in charge of it—not that it's your fault of course. And young Stackpoole laid up with the 'flu.' "

"We'll manage," said Norman. "Sit down and tell me about Evelyn."

Unwillingly, Sawtelle cleared a space so he could perch on the cluttered desk. He groaned when his eyes changed to light on papers presumably concerned with urgent business.

"It happened about four o'clock Sunday morning," he began, aimlessly fiddling with the papers. "I was awakened by a terrible scream. Evelyn's bed was empty. It was pitch

dark out in the hall. But I could hear some sort of struggle going on downstairs. A bumping and threshing around—"

Suddenly he jerked up his head. "What was that? I thought I heard footsteps out in the front hall." Before Norman could say anything he went on. "Oh, it's just my nerves. They've been acting up ever since."

"Well, I picked up something—a vase—and went downstairs. About that time the sounds stopped. I switched on the lights and went through all the rooms. In the sewing room I found Evelyn stretched unconscious on the floor with some ghastly bruises beginning to show around her neck and mouth. Beside her lay the phone—we have it there because Evelyn has so many occasions to use it. I nearly went frantic. I called a doctor and the police. When Evelyn regained consciousness, she was able to tell us about it, although she was terribly shaken up. It seems the phone had rung. She went downstairs in the dark without waking me. Just as she was picking up the phone, a man jumped out of the corner and attacked her. She fought him off—oh, it drives me mad to think of it!—but he overpowered her and choked her unconscious."

In his excitement Sawtelle crumpled a paper he was holding, saw what he had done, and hastily smoothed it out.

"Thank heavens I came downstairs when I did! That must have been what frightened him off. The doctor found that, except for bruises, there weren't any other injuries. Even the doctor was shocked at those bruises, though. He said he had never seen any quite like them."

"The police think that after the man got in the house he called Cen-

tral and asked them to ring this phone—pretending he thought the bell was out of order or something—in order to lure someone downstairs. They were puzzled as to how he got inside, though, for all the windows and doors were shut fast. Probably I forgot to lock the front door when we went to bed—one of my pieces of unforgiveable carelessness!"

"The police think he was a burglar or sex offender, but I believe he must have been a real madman besides. Because there was a silver plate on the floor, and two of our silver forks jammed together strangely, and other odds and ends. And he must have been playing the phonograph in the sewing room, because it was open and the turntable was going and on the floor was one of Evelyn's speech records, smashed to bits."

Norman stared at his jittery departmental superior, but behind the stupidity of his gaze, his thoughts were working wildly. The first idea that stayed with him was that here was physical confirmation that he had heard a bull-roarer over the Bayport phone—what else could the smashed record mean?—and that Evelyn Sawtelle was going through the motions of practicing magic as much as Tansy ever had—else what was the significance of silver plate and forks and "other odds and ends"? Also, Evelyn must have been expecting a call and been prepared for it, else why would she have had the things ready?

But then his thoughts scurried on to what Sawtelle had said about his wife's injuries—those bruises that sounded identical with the ones Tansy had inflicted on herself with, or somehow received from, a phone. The same bruises, the same possible instruments, suggested a shadow world in which black magic, thwart-

ed, returned on its sender, or in which schemes to frighten by the pretense of black magic struck back at the guilty and psychotic mind of their originator.

"It's all my fault," Sawtelle was repeating mournfully, tugging at his necktie. Norman remembered that Sawtelle always assumed that he was guilty whenever anything hurt or merely upset Evelyn. "I should have awakened! I should have been the one to go down to the phone. When I think of that delicate creature feeling her way through the dark, and lurking just ahead of her that—Oh, and the department! I tell you I am going out of my mind. Poor Evelyn has been in such a pitifully frightened state ever since, you wouldn't believe it!" And he tugged at his necktie so strongly that it started to choke him and he had to undo it quickly.

"I tell you, I haven't slept a wink," he continued when he got his breath. "If Mrs. Gunnison hadn't been kind enough to spend a couple of hours with Evelyn yesterday morning, I don't know how I'd have managed. Even then she was too frightened to let me stir My God! . . . Evelyn!"

But Norman couldn't identify the agonized scream, and he seriously doubted with Sawtelle could, except that it had come from the upper part of the house. Crying out, "I knew I heard footsteps! He's come back!" Sawtelle ran full tilt out of the study. Norman was just behind him, suddenly conscious of a very different fear. It was confirmed by a glance through the living-room window at his empty car.

He beat Sawtelle up the stairs and was the first to reach the bedroom door. He stopped. Sawtelle, almost gibbering with anxiety and guilt, ran

into him.

It was not at all what Norman expected.

The pink silk coverlet clutched around her, Evelyn Sawtelle had retreated to the side of the bed nearest the wall. Her teeth were chattering, her face was a dirty white.

Beside the bed stood Tansy. For a moment Norman felt a great, sudden hope. Then he saw her eyes, and the hope shot away with sickening swiftness. She was not wearing the veil. In that heavy make-up with those rouged cheeks and thickly carmined lips, she looked like some indecently daubed statue, impossibly grotesque against a background of ridiculous pink silk hangings. But a hungry statue.

SAWTELLE SCRAMBLED past him, shouting, "What's happened? What's happened?" He saw Tansy. "I didn't know you were here. When did you come in?" Then, "You frightened her!"

The statue spoke, and its quiet accents hushed him.

"Oh, no, I didn't frighten her. Did I, Evelyn?"

Evelyn Sawtelle was staring at Tansy in abject, wide-eyed terror, and her jaw was still working. But when she spoke, it was to say, "No, Tansy didn't . . . frighten me. We were talking together . . . and then . . . I . . . I thought I heard a noise?" "Just a noise, dear?" Sawtelle said.

"Yes . . . like footsteps . . . very quiet footsteps in the hall." She did not take her eyes off Tansy, who nodded once when she had finished.

Norman accompanied Sawtelle on a futile but highly melodramatic search of the top floor. When they came back, Evelyn was alone.

"Tansy's gone out to the car," she

told Norman weakly. "I'm sure I just imagined those footsteps."

But her eyes were still full of fear when he left her and she seemed quite unaware of her husband, although he was fussing about straightening the coverlet and shaking out the pillows.

Tansy was sitting in the car, staring ahead. Norman could see the body was still dominated by its one emotion. He had to ask a question.

"She does not have my soul," was the answer. "I questioned her at length. As a final and certain test I embraced her. That was when she screamed. She is very much afraid of the dead."

"What did she tell you?"

"She said that someone came and took my soul from her. Someone who did not trust her very much. Someone who desired my soul, to keep as a hostage and for other reasons. Mrs. Gunnison."

The knuckles of Norman's hands were white on the steering wheel. He was thinking of that puzzling look of appeal that Mrs. Gunnison had given him.

CHAPTER XVIII

PROFESSOR CARR'S office seemed an attempt to reduce the lusty material world to the virginal purity of geometry. The narrow walls displayed three framed prints of conic sections. Atop the bookcase filled with slim, gold-stamped mathematic books, were two models of complex curved surfaces, executed in German silver and fine wire. The half-furled umbrella in the corner might have been another such model. And the surface of the small desk between Carr himself and Norman was bare except for five sheets of paper covered with symbols. Carr's

thin pale finger touched the top sheet.

"Yes," he said, "these are allowable equations in symbolic logic."

Norman had been pretty sure they were, but he was glad to hear a mathematician say so. The hurried reference he had made to *Principia Mathematica* had not altogether satisfied him.

"The capitals stand for classes of entities, the lower case letters for relationships," he said helpfully.

"Ah, yes." Carr tugged at the dark skin of his chin beneath the white Vandyke. "But what sort of entities and relationships are they?"

"You could perform operations on the equations, couldn't you, without knowing the reference of the individual symbols?" Norman countered.

"Most certainly. And the results of the operations would be valid whether the entities referred to were apples, battleships, poetic ideas, or signs of the zodiac. Always providing, of course, that the original references between entity and symbol had been made correctly."

"Then here's my problem," Norman went on hastily. "There are seventeen equations on that first sheet. As they stand, they seem to differ a great deal. Now I'm wondering if one simple, underlying equation doesn't appear in each of the seventeen, jumbled up with a lot of nonessential terms and procedures. Each of the other sheets presents a similar problem."

"Hm-m—" Professor Carr began to finger a pencil, and his eyes started to go back to the first sheet, but he checked the movement. "I must confess, I'm rather curious about the entities referred to," he said, and added innocently, "I wasn't aware that there had been attempts to

apply symbolic logic to sociology."

Norman was prepared for this. "I'll be frank with you, Linthicum," he said. "I have a pretty wild, off-trail theory, and I've promised myself I won't discuss it until I have a better idea of whether or not there's anything to it."

Carr's face broke into a reminiscent smile. "I think I understand your sentiments," he said. "I can still recall the disastrous consequences of my announcement that I had trisected the angle."

"Of course, I was only in seventh grade at the time," he added hastily.

"Though I did give my teacher a bad half-hour," he finished with a touch of pride.

When he next spoke, it was with a return to his mood of boyishly sly curiosity. "Nevertheless, I'm very much piqued by those symbols. As it stands they might refer to . . . hm-mm . . . anything."

"I'm sorry," said Norman. "I know I'm asking a lot of you."

"Not at all. Not at all." Twiddling the pencil Carr glanced again at the sheet. Something caught his eye. "Hm-m-m . . . this is very interesting," he said. "I hadn't noticed this before." And his pencil began to fly about the sheet, deftly striking out terms, neatly inscribing new equations. The single vertical furrow between his gray eyebrows deepened. In a moment he was wholly absorbed.

With an unbreathed sigh of relief, Norman leaned back. He felt dog-tired, and his eyes hurt. Those five sheets represented twenty hours of uninterrupted work. Tuesday night, Wednesday morning, part of Wednesday afternoon. Even at that he couldn't have done it without Tansy to take notes from his dictation. He had come to trust absolutely her present mindless, machinelike

accuracy.

Half hypnotized, he watched the agile old fingers half fill a fresh sheet of paper with derived equations. Their swift, orderly movements intensified the serene, monastic quiet of the small office.

What strangeness pressing on the heels of strangeness it was, Norman thought dreamily, not only to pretend to believe in black magic in order to overawe three superstitious, psychotic women who had a hold on his wife's mental life, but even to invoke the modern science of symbolic logic in the service of that pretended belief. Symbolic logic used to disentangle the contradictions and ambiguities of witchcraft formulas! What wouldn't old Carr say if he were really told "the entities referred to!"

And yet it had only been by invoking the superior prestige of higher mathematics that he had been able to convince Tansy that he could make strong enough magic to work against her enemies. And that was all in the best traditions of sorcery, when you came to think of it. Sorcerers always tried to incorporate the latest bits of information and wisdom in to their systems, for prestige purposes. What was sorcery but a battle for prestige in the realms of mysticism, and what was a sorcerer but someone who had gotten an illegitimate mental jump on his fellows?

What a ludicrous picture it was, though (everything was beginning to seem hysterically laughable to his weary mind): a woman who half believed in witchcraft driven mad by three women who perhaps believed fully in witchcraft or perhaps not at all, their schemes opposed by a husband who believed not at all, but pretended to believe to the full—and was determined to act in every way in accord with that belief.

Or, he thought (his dreaminess verging toward slumber and the sweet mathematical simplicity of his surroundings wooing his mind toward visions of abso lute space in which infinity was before his eyes), why not drop all these stuffy rationalizations and admit that Tansy had something called a soul and that it had been stolen by the thin witch Evelyn Sawtelle, and then stolen from her by the fat witch Hulda Gunnison, and that he was even now seeking the magic that would—

He jerked himself resolutely awake and back to the world of rationalizations again. Carr had shoved a paper toward him and had immediately started to work on another of the five sheets Norman had given him.

"You've already found the first underlying equations?" Norman asked incredulously.

Carr seemed annoyed at the interruption. "Surely. Of course." His pencil had already started to dart about again, when he stopped and looked at Norman oddly. "Yes," he said, "it's the last equation there, the short one. To tell the truth, I wasn't sure I'd find one when I started out, but your entities and relationships seem to have some sense to them, whatever they are." And then he and his pencil were off again.

NORMAN SHIVERED, staring at the brief ultimate equation, wondering what its meaning might be. He could not tell without referring to his code and he certainly didn't want to get that out here.

"Sorry to be making all this work for you," he said dully.

Carr spared him a glance. "Not at all, I enjoy it. I always did have a peculiar knack for these things."

The afternoon shadows deepened. Norman switched on the overhead

light, and Carr thanked him with a quick preoccupied nod. The pencil flew. Three more sheets had been shoved across to Norman, and Carr was finishing the last one, when the door opened.

"Linthicum!" came the sweet voice, with hardly a trace of reproach fulness. "Whatever's keeping you? I've waited downstairs half an hour."

"I'm sorry, dear," said the old man, looking at his watch and his wife. "But I had become so absorbed—"

She saw Norman. "Oh, I didn't know you had a visitor. *Whatever* will Professor Saylor *think*! I'm afraid I've given him the impression that I tyrannize over you."

And she accompanied the words with such a quaint smile that Norman found himself echoing Carr's "Not at all."

"Professor Saylor looks *dead* tired," she said, peering at Norman anxiously. "I hope you haven't been wearing him out, Linthicum."

"Oh, no, my dear. I've been doing all the work" her husband told her.

She walked around the desk and looked over his shoulder. "What is it?" she asked, pleasantly.

"I don't know," he said. He straightened up and, winking at Norman, went on, "I believe that, behind these symbols, Professor Saylor is revolutionizing the science of sociology. But it's a great secret. And in any case I haven't the slightest idea of what the symbols refer to. I'm just being a sort of electronic brain."

With a polite, by-your-leave nod toward Norman, Mrs. Carr picked up one of the sheets and studied it through her thick glasses. But apparently at sight of the massed rows of symbols, she put it down.

"Mathematics is not my forte," she

explained. "I was *such* a poor scholar."

"Nonsense, Flora," said Carr. "Whenever we go to the market, you're much quicker at totaling the bill than I am. And I try to beat you, too."

"But that's such a *little* thing," said Mrs. Carr delightedly.

"I'll only be a moment more," said her husband, returning to his calculations.

Mrs. Carr spoke across to Norman in a half-whisper. "Oh, Professor Saylor, would you be so kind as to convey a message to Tansy? I want to invite her for bridge tomorrow night—that's Thursday—with Hulda Gunnison and Evelyn Sawtelle. Linthicum has a *meeting*."

"I'll be glad to," said Norman quickly. "But I'm afraid she might not be up to it." And he explained about the food poisoning.

"How too, too *terrible*!" observed Mrs. Carr. "Couldn't I come over and help her?"

"Thank you," Norman lied, "but we have someone staying with her."

"How *wise*," said Mrs. Carr, and she looked at Norman intently, as if to spy out the source of that wisdom. Her steady gaze made him feel uncomfortable, it seemed at once so predatory and so naive. It somehow wouldn't have surprised him in one of his students, one of his girl students, but in this old woman—

Carr put down his pencil. "There," he said. "I'm done."

With further expression of thanks, Norman gathered up the sheets.

"Really no trouble at all," Carr assured him. "You gave me a very exciting afternoon. I must confess you've aroused my curiosity."

"Linthicum dotes on anything mathematical, especially when it's like a puzzle," Mrs. Carr told him.

"Why, once," she continued, with a kind of roguish indulgence, "he made all sorts of tabulations on horse races."

"Er . . . yes . . . but only as a concrete example of the calculus of probabilities," Carr interposed quickly. But his smile was equally indulgent.

Her hand was on his shoulder, and he had reached up his own to cover hers. Frail, yet somehow hearty, withered, yet somehow fresh, they seemed like the perfect aged couple.

"I promise you," Norman told him, "that if I revolutionize the science of sociology, you'll be the first to hear of it. Good evening." And he bowed out.

As soon as he could hurry home he got out the code. "W" was the identifying letter at the top of the first sheet. He thought he remembered what that meant, but he looked it up just to be sure.

"W—To conjure out the soul."

Yes, that was it. He turned to the supplementary sheet covered with Carr's calculations, and carefully decoded the final equation. "C—Notched strip of copper." He nodded. "T—Twirl sunwise." He frowned. He could have expected that to cancel out. Good thing he'd gotten a mathematician's help in simplifying the seventeen equations, each representing a different people's formula for conjuring out the soul—Arabian, Zulu, Polynesian, American Negro, American Indian, and so on; the most recent formulas available, and ones that had known actual use.

"A—Deadly amanita." Brother! He'd been certain that one would cancel out. It would be a bit of time and trouble getting a deathcup mushroom. Well, he could manage without that formula if he had to. He took up two other sheets: "V—To

control the soul of another," "Z—To cause the dwellers in a house to sleep" and set to work on one of them. In a few minutes he had assured himself that the ingredients presented no special difficulties, save that Z required a Hand of Glory to be used as well as graveyard dirt to be thrown onto the roof of the house in which sleep was to be enforced. But he ought to have little difficulty in filching a suitable severed hand from the anatomy lab. And then if—

CONSCIOUS OF a sudden weariness and of a revulsion from these formulas, which persisted in seeming more obscene than ridiculous, he pushed back his chair. For the first time since he had come into the house, he looked at the figure by the window. It sat in the rocking chair, face turned toward the drawn curtains. When it had started rocking, he did not know. But the muscles of its body automatically continued the rhythmical movement, once it had begun.

With the suddenness of a blow, longing for Tansy struck him. Her intonations, her gestures, her mannerisms, her funny fancies—all the little things that go to make a person real and human and loved—he wanted them all instantly; and the presence of this dead-alive imitation, this husk of Tansy, only made the longing less bearable. And what sort of a man was he, to be puttering around with occult formulas, while all the time—"There are things that can be done to a soul," she had said. "Servant girls of the Gunnisons have told stories—" He ought to go straight to the Gunnisons, confront Hulda, and force the issue!

With a quick effort he subdued his anger. Any such action on his part

might ruin everything. How could you use open force against someone who held the mentality, the very consciousness of your dearest possession as a hostage? No, he had been all over this before and his course was set. He must fight those women with their own weapons; these repugnant occult formulas were his best hope and he had gotten his usual punishment for making the mistake of looking at its face. Deliberately he moved to the other side of the table, so his back was toward the rocking chair.

But he was restless, his muscles itching with fatigue poisons, and for the moment he could not get back to work.

Suddenly he spoke. "Why do you suppose everything has become violent and deadly so abruptly?"

"The Balance was upset," was the answer. There was no interruption in the steady rocking.

"How was that?" He started to look over the back of his chair, but checked himself in time.

"It happened when I ceased to practice magic." The rocking was a grating monotony.

"But why should that lead to violence?"

"It upset the Balance."

"Yes, but how can that explain the abruptness of the shift from relatively trivial attacks to a deadly maliciousness?"

The rocking had stopped. There was no answer. But, as he told himself, he knew the answer already that was shaping in that mindless mind behind him. This witches' warfare it believed in was very much like trench warfare or a battle between fortified lines—a state of siege. Just as reinforced concrete or armor plating nullified the shells, so countercharms and protective pro-

cedures rendered relatively futile the most violent onslaughts. But once the armor and concrete were gone, and the witch who had foresworn witchcraft was out in a kind of no man's land—

Then, too, fear of the savage counter attacks that could be launched from such highly fortified positions, that was a potent factor in discouraging direct assaults. The natural thing would be to sit pat, snipe away, and only attack if the enemy exposed himself recklessly. Besides, there were probably all sorts of unsuspected hostages and secret agreements, all putting a damper on violence.

This idea also seemed to explain why Tansy's apparently pacific action had upset the Balance. What would any country think, if in the midst of a war, its enemy scuttled all his battleships, and dismantled all his aircraft, apparently laying himself wide open to attack? For the realistic mind, there could be only one likely answer. Namely, that the enemy had discovered a weapon far more potent than battleships or aircraft, and was planning to ask for a peace that would turn out to be a trap. The only thing would be to strike instantly and hard, before the secret weapon could be brought into play.

"I think—" he started to say.

Then something—perhaps a faint *whish* in the air or a slight creaking of the floor under the heavy carpet, or some less tangible sensation—caused him to glance around.

With a writhing jerk sideways, he managed—just managed—to get his head out of the path of that descending metal flail, which was all he saw at first. With a shocking *swish* it crashed downward against the heavy back of the chair and its force was

broken. But his shoulder, which took only the broken blow, went numb.

Clawing at the table with his good hand, he threw himself forward against the table and whirled around.

He recoiled from the sight as from another blow, throwing back his good hand to save himself from overbalancing.

It was poised in the center of the room, having sprung back catlike after the first blow failed. Almost stiff-legged, but with the weight forward. In stocking feet—the slippers that might have made a noise were laid by the rocking chair. In its hand was the steel poker, stealthily lifted from the stand by the fireplace.

There was life in the face now. But it was life that champed the teeth and drooled, life that pinched and flared the nostrils with every breath, life that switched hair from the eyes with quick, angry flirts, life that glared redly and steadily.

With a low snarl it lifted the poker and struck, not at him, but at the chandelier overhead. Pitch darkness flooded the room he had curtained tightly against prying eyes.

There was a rush of soft footsteps. He ducked to one side. Nevertheless, the *swish* came perilously close. There was a sound as if it had dived or rolled across the table after he eluded the headlong rush—he could hear the slur of papers skidding and the faint crackle as some drifted to the floor. Then silence, except for the rapid *snuff-snuff* of animal breathing.

He crouched on the carpet, trying not to move a muscle, straining his ears to catch the direction of that breathing. Abominable, he thought, how inefficient the human auditory system is at localizing a sound. First the snuffing sound came from one

direction, then another, although he could not hear the slightest rustle of intervening movement—until he began to lose his sense of direction in the room. He tried to remember his exact movements in springing away from the table. As he had hit the carpet, he had spun around. But how far? Was he facing toward or away from the wall? In his zeal to avoid the possibility of anyone spying on them, he had blacked out this room and the bedroom, and the blackout was effective. No discernible atom of light filtered through from the night outside. He was somewhere on what was beginning to seem an endless expanse of carpet, a low-ceilinged, wall-less infinity.

And somewhere else on that expanse, it was. Could it see and hear more than he? Could it discern form in retinal patterns that were only blackness to Tansy's sane soul? What was it waiting for? He strained his ears, but the rapid breathing was no longer audible.

THIS MIGHT be the darkness of some jungle floor, roofed by yards of matted creepers. Civilization is a thing of light. When light goes, civilization is snuffed out. Norman was rapidly being reduced to *its* level. Perhaps it had counted on that when it smashed the lights. This might be the inner chamber of some primeval cave, and he some cloudy-minded primitive huddled in abject terror of his mate, into whose beloved form a demon had been conjured up by the witch woman—the brawny, fat witch woman with the sullen lip and brutish eyes, and copper ornaments twisted in matted red hair. Should he grope for his ax and seek to smash the demon from the skull where it was hiding? Or should he seek out the witch woman and throttle her until

she called off her demon? But how could he constrain his wife meanwhile? If the tribe found her, they would slay her instantly—it was the law. And even now the demon in her was seeking to slay him.

With thoughts almost as murky and confused as those of that ghostly primitive forerunner, Norman sought to grapple with the problem, until he suddenly realized what it was waiting for.

Already his muscles were aching. He was getting twinges of pain from his shoulder as the numbness went out of it. Soon he would make an involuntary movement. And in that instant it would be upon him.

Cautiously he stretched out his hand. Slowly—very slowly—he swung it around until it touched a small table and located a large book. Clamping thumb and fingers around the book where it projected from the table edge, he lifted it and drew it to him. His muscles began to shake a little from the effort to maintain absolute quiet.

With a slow movement he launched the book toward the center of the room, so that it hit the carpet a few feet from him. The sound drew the instant response he had hoped for. Waiting a second he dove forward, seeking to pin it to the floor. But its cunning was greater than he had guessed. His arms closed on a heavy cushion that it had hurled toward the book, and only luck saved him as the poker thudded savagely against the carpet close by his head.

Clutching out blindly, his hands closed on the cold metal. There was a moment of straining as it sought to break his grip. Then he was sprawling backwards, the poker in his hand, and the footsteps were retreating toward the rear of the house.

He followed it to the kitchen. A

drawer, jerked out too far, fell to the floor, and he heard the chilling clatter and scrape of cutlery.

But there was enough light in the kitchen to show him its silhouette. He lunged at the upraised hand holding the long knife, caught the wrist. Then it threw itself against him, and they dropped to the floor.

He felt the warm body against his, murderously animated to the last limits of its strength. For a moment he felt the coldness of the flat of the knife against his cheek, then he had forced the weapon away. He doubled up his legs to protect himself from its knees. It surged convulsively down on him and he felt jaws clamp the arm with which he held away the knife. Teeth sawed sideways trying to penetrate the fabric of his coat. Cloth ripped as he sought with his free hand to drag the body away from him. Then he found the hair and forced back the head so the teeth lost their grip. It dropped the knife and clawed at his face. He seized the fingers seeking his eyes and nostrils; it snarled and spat at him. Steadily he forced the arms, twisting them behind it, and with a sudden effort got to his knees. Strangled sounds of fury came from its throat.

Only too keenly aware of how close his muscles were to the trembling weakness of exhaustion, he shifted his grip so that with one hand he held the straining wrists. With the other, he groped sideways, jerked open the lower door of the cabinet, found a length of cord.

CHAPTER XIX

"IT'S PRETTY serious this time, Norm," said Harold Gunnison. "Fenner and Liddell really want your scalp."

Norman drew his chair closer, as if

the discussion were the real reason for his visit to Gunnison's office this morning.

Gunnison went on, "I think they're planning to rake up that Margaret Van Nice business and start yelping that where there's smoke there must be fire. And they may try to use Theodore Jennings against you. Claim that his 'nervous breakdown' was aggravated by unfairness and undue severity on your part, et cetera. Of course we have the strongest defense for you in both cases, still just talking about such matters is bound to have an unfavorable effect on the other trustees. And then this talk on sex you're going to give the Offcampus Mothers, and those theatrical friends of yours you've invited to the college. I have no personal objections, Norm, but you did pick a bad time."

Norman nodded, dutifully. Mrs. Gunnison ought to be here soon. The maid had told him over the phone that she had just left for her husband's office.

"Of course, such matters aren't enough in themselves." Gunnison looked unusually heavy-eyed and grave. "But as I say, they have a bad taste, and they can be used as an entering wedge. The real danger will come from a restrained but concerted attack on your conduct of classes, your public utterances, and perhaps even trivial details of your social life, followed by talk about the need for retrenchment where it is expeditious—you know what I mean." He paused. "What really bothers me is that Pollard's cooled toward you. I told him just what I thought of Sawtelle's appointment, but he said the trustees had overruled him. He's a good man, but he's a politician." And Gunnison shrugged, as if it were common knowledge that

the distinction between politicians and professors went back to the Ice Age.

Norman roused himself. "I'm afraid I insulted him last week. We had a long talk and I blew up."

Gunnison shook his head. "That wouldn't explain it. He can absorb insults. If he sides against you, it will be because he feels it necessary or at least expeditious (I hate that word) on the grounds of public opinion. You know his way of running the college. Every couple of years he throws someone to the wolves."

Norman hardly heard him. He was thinking of Tansy's body as he had left it—the trussed-up limbs, the lolling jaw, the hoarse heavy breathing from the whiskey he had finally made it guzzle. He was taking a long chance, but he couldn't see any other way. At one time last night he had almost decided to call a doctor and perhaps have it placed in a sanitarium. But if he did that he might lose forever his chance to restore Tansy's rightful self. What psychiatrist would believe the morbid plot he knew existed against his wife's sanity? For similar reasons there was no friend he could call on for help. No, the only way was to strike swiftly at Mrs. Gunnison. But it was not pleasant to think of such headlines as "PROFESSOR'S WIFE A TORTURE VICTIM. FOUND TRUSSED IN CLOSET BY MATE."

"It's really serious, Norm," Gunnison was repeating. "My wife thinks so, and she's smart about these things. She knows people."

His wife! Obediently, Norman nodded.

"Hard luck it had to come to a head now," Gunnison continued, "when you've been having more than your share of troubles with sickness and what-not." Norman could see

that Gunnison was looking with a faint shade of inquisitiveness at the strip of surgical tape close to the corner of his left eye and the other one just below his nostrils. But he attempted no explanation. Gunnison shifted about and resettled himself in his chair. "Norm," he said, "I've got the feeling that something's gone wrong. Ordinarily I'd say you could weather this blow all right—you're one of our two-three best men—but I've got the feeling that something's gone wrong all the way down the line."

The offer his words conveyed was obvious enough, and Norman knew it was made in good faith. But only for a moment did he consider telling Gunnison even a fraction of the truth. It would be like taking his troubles into the law courts, and he could imagine—with the sharp, almost hallucinatory vividness of extreme fatigue—what that would be like.

Imagine putting Tansy in the witness box even in her earlier non-violent condition. "You say, Mrs. Saylor, that your soul was stolen from your body?" "Yes." "You are conscious of the absence of your soul?" "No, I am not conscious, of anything." "Not conscious? You surely don't mean that you are unconscious?" "But I do. I can neither see nor hear." "You mean that you can neither see nor hear me?" "That is correct." "How then—" Bang of the judge's gavel. "If this tittering does not cease immediately, I will clear the court!" Or Mrs. Gunnison called to the witness box and he himself bursting out with an impassioned plea to the jury. "Gentlemen, look at her eyes! Watch them closely, I implore you. My wife's soul is there, if you would only see it!"

"What's the matter, Norm?" he

heard Gunnison ask. The genuine sympathy of the voice tugged at him confusedly. Groggy with sudden sleepiness, he tried to rally himself to answer.

Mrs. Gunnison walked in.

"Hullo," she said. "I'm glad you two finally got together." Almost patronizingly she looked Norman over. "I don't think you've slept in the last two nights," she announced brusquely. "And what's happened to your face? Did that cat of yours finally scratch it?"

Gunnison laughed, as he usually did, at his wife's frankness. "What a woman. Loves dogs. Hates cats. But she's right about your needing sleep, Norm."

The sight of her and the sound of her voice stung Norman into an icy wakefulness. She looked as if she had been sleeping ten hours a night for some time. An expensive green suit set off her red hair and gave her a kind of buxom beauty. Her slip showed and the coat was buttoned in a disorderly way, but now it conveyed to Norman the effect of the privileged carelessness of some all-powerful ruler who is above ordinary standards of neatness. For once she was not carrying the bulging purse. His heart leaped.

He did not trust himself to look into her eyes. He started to get up.

"Don't go yet, Norm," Gunnison told him. "There's a lot we should talk about."

"Yes, why don't you stay?" Mrs. Gunnison seconded.

"Sorry," said Norman. "I'll come around this afternoon if you can spare the time. Or tomorrow morning, at the latest."

"Be sure and do that," said Gunnison seriously. "The trustees are meeting tomorrow afternoon."

Mrs. Gunnison sat down in the

chair he had vacated.

"My regards to Tansy," she said, "I'll be seeing her tonight at the Carrs—that is, if she's recovered sufficiently." Norman nodded. Then he walked out rapidly and shut the door behind him.

While his hand was still on the knob, he saw Mrs. Gunnison's green purse lying on the table in the outer office. It was just this side of the display case of Prince Rupert drops and similar oddities. His heart jumped again.

THERE WAS one girl in the outer office—a student employee. He went to her desk.

"Miss Miller," he said, "would you be so kind as to get me the grade sheets of the following students?" And he rattled off half a dozen names.

"The sheets are in the Recorder's Office, Professor Saylor," she said, a little doubtfully.

"I know. But you tell them I sent you. Dr. Gunnison and I want to look them over."

Obediently she took down the names.

As the door closed behind her he pulled out the top drawer of her desk, where he knew the key for the display case would be.

A few minutes later Mrs. Gunnison came out.

"I thought I heard you go out," she exclaimed sharply. Then in her usual blunt manner, "Are you waiting for me to leave, so you can talk to Harold alone?"

He did not answer. He glanced at her nose.

She picked up her purse. "There's really no point in your trying to make a secret of it," she said. "I know as much about your troubles here as he does—in fact, considerably more."

And, to be honest, they're pretty bad." Her voice had begun to assume the arrogance of the victor. She smiled at him.

He continued to look at her nose.

"And you needn't pretend you're not worried," she went on, her voice reacting irritably to his silence. "Because I know you are. And to-morrow Pollard will ask for your resignation." Then, "What are you staring at?"

"Nothing," he answered, hastily, averting his glance.

With an incredulous sniff, she took out her mirror, glanced at it puzzledly for a moment, then held it up for a detailed inspection of her face.

To Norman the second hand on the wall clock seemed to stand still.

Very softly, but swiftly, and in a most casual voice, which did not even cause Mrs. Gunnison to look around, he said, "I know you've stolen my wife's soul, Mrs. Gunnison, and I know how you've stolen it. I know a bit about stealing souls myself; for instance, if you're in a room with someone whose soul you want, and they happen to be looking into a mirror, and the mirror breaks while their reflection is still in it, then—"

With a swift, tinkling crack, not very loud, the mirror in Mrs. Gunnison's hand puffed into a little cloud of iridescent dust.

Instantly, it seemed to Norman that a weight added itself to his mind, a tangible darkness pressed down upon his thoughts.

The gasp of astonishment or fear that issued from Mrs. Gunnison's lips was cut short. What seemed a loose, stupid look flowed slowly over her face, but it was only because the muscles of her face had quite relaxed.

Norman stepped up to Mrs. Gunnison and took her arm. For a moment she stared at him, emptily, then her body lurched, she took a

slow step, then another, as he said, "Come with me. It's your best chance."

He trembled, hardly able to credit his success, as she followed him into the hall. Near the stairs they met Miss Miller returning with a handful of large cards.

"I'm very sorry to have put you to the trouble," he told her. "But it turned out that we don't need them. You had better return them to the Recorder's Office."

The girl nodded with a polite but somewhat wry smile. "Professors!"

As Norman steered the uncharacteristically docile Mrs. Gunnison out of the Administration Building, the queer darkness still pressed upon his thoughts. It was like nothing he had ever before experienced.

Suddenly then the darkness parted, as storm clouds might part at sunset, letting through a narrow beam of crimson light. Only the storm clouds were inside his mind and the crimson light was impotent red rage and obscene anger. And yet it was not wholly unfamiliar.

From it, Norman's mind cringed. The campus ahead seemed to wobble and waver, tinged by a faint red glare.

He thought: "If there were such a thing as split personality, and if a crack appeared in the wall between those separate consciousnesses . . ."

But that was insanity.

Abruptly another memory buffeted him—words that had issued from Tansy's lips in the Pullman compartment: "The environment of the soul is the human brain."

Again: "If it is prevented from re-entering its own body, it is irresistibly drawn to another, whether or not that other body possesses a soul. And so the captive soul is usually imprisoned

in the brain of its captor."

Just then, through the slit in the darkness, riding a wave in the pounding red anger that hurled it to the center of his mind, came an intelligible thought. The thought was simply, "Stupid man, how did you do it?" but it, like the red rage, was so utterly *like* Mrs. Gunnison, that he accepted (whether or not it meant he was crazy, whether or not it meant witch craft was true) that the mind of Mrs. Gunnison was inside his skull, talking with his mind.

FOR A MOMENT he glanced at the slack-featured face of the hulking female body he was piloting across the campus.

For a moment he quailed at the idea of touching, with his mind, naked personality.

But only for a moment. Then (whether or not it meant he was crazy) his acceptance was complete. He walked across campus, talking inside his head with Mrs. Gunnison.

The questioning thought was repeated: "How did you do it?"

Before he realized it, his own thoughts had answered:

"It was the Prince Rupert mirror from the display case. The warmth of your fingers shattered it. I held it lightly in the folds of my handkerchief while transferring it to your pocketbook. According to primitive belief, your reflection is your soul, or a vehicle for your soul. If a mirror breaks when your reflection is in it, your soul is trapped outside your body." All this, without the machinery of speech to delay it, flashed in an instant.

Instantly too, Mrs. Gunnison's next thought came through the slit in the darkness. "Where are you taking my body?"

"To our house"

"What do you want?"

"My wife's soul."

There was a long pause. The slit in the darkness closed, then opened again.

"You cannot take it. I hold it, as you hold my soul. But my soul hides it from you. And my soul holds it."

"I cannot take it. But I can hold your soul until you return my wife's soul to her body."

"What if I refuse?"

"Your husband is a realist. He will not believe what your body tells him. He will consult the best alienists. He will be very much grieved. But in the end he will commit your body to an asylum."

He could sense defeat and submission—and a kind of panic, too—in the texture of the answering thought. But defeat and submission were not yet admitted directly.

"You will not be able to hold my soul. You hate it. It fills you with abhorrence. Your mind will not be able to endure it."

Then, in immediate substantiation of this statement, there came through the slit a nasty trickle growing swiftly to a spate. His chief detestations were quickly spied out and reaped upon. He began to hurry his steps, so that the mindless bulk beside him breathed hard.

"There was Ann," came Mrs. Gunnison's thoughts, not in words but in the complete fullness of memory. "Ann came to work for me eight years ago. A frail-looking little blonde, but able to get through a hard day's work for all that. She was very submissive, and a prey to fear. Do you know that it is possible to rule people through fear alone, without an atom of direct force? A sharp word, a stern look—it's the implications that do it, not what's said directly. Gradually I gathered about myself all the grim

prestige that father, teacher, and preacher had had for Ann. I could make her cry by looking at her in a certain way. I could make her writhe with fright just by standing outside the door of her bedroom. I could make her hold hot dishes without a whimper while serving us at dinner, and make her wait while I talked to Harold. I've looked at her hands afterward."

Similarly he lived through the stories of Clara and Milly, Mary and Ermengarde. He could not shut his own mind from hers, nor could he close the slit, though it was within his power to widen it. Like some foul medusa, or some pulpy carnivorous plant, her soul unfolded and clung to his, until it seemed almost that his was the prisoner.

"And there was Trudie. Trudie worshipped me. She was a big girl, slow and a little stupid. She had come from a farm. She used to spend hours on my clothes. I encouraged her in various ways, until everything about me became sacred to Trudie. She lived for my little signs of favor. In the end she would do anything for me, which was very amusing, because she was very easily embarrassed and never lost her painfully acute sense of shame."

But now he was at the door of his house, and the unclean trickle of thoughts ceased. The slit narrowed to the tiniest watchful crack.

He shepherded Mrs. Gunnison's body to the door of Tansy's dressing room. He pointed at the bound form huddled on the blanket he had thrown across the floor. It lay as he had left it, eyes closed, jaw lolling, breathing heavily. The sight seemed to add a second crushing pressure to his mind, pressing on it from below, through his eye-sockets.

"Take away what you have con-

jured into it," he heard himself command.

There was a pause. A black spider crawled off Tansy's skirt and scuttled across the blanket. Even as there came the thought, "That is it," he lunged out and cracked it under his heel as it escaped onto the flooring. He was aware of a half-cloaked comment, "Its soul sought the nearest body. Now faithful King will go on no more errands for me. No more will he animate human flesh or wood or stone. I will have to find another dog."

"Return to it what you have taken," he commanded.

This time there was a longer pause. The slit closed entirely.

The bound figure stirred, as if seeking to roll over. The lips moved. The slack jaw tightened. Conscious only of the black weight against his mind, and of a sensory awareness so acute that he believed he could hear the very beating of the heart in Tansy's body, he stooped and cut the lashings, removed the carefully arranged paddings from wrists and ankles.

The head rolled restlessly from side to side. The lips seemed to be saying, "Norman . . ." The eyelids fluttered and he felt a shiver go over his body. And then, in one sudden glorious flood, like some flower blooming miraculously in an instant, expression surged into the face, the limp hands caught at his shoulders, and from the wide-open eyes a lucid, sane, fearless human soul peered up at him.

An instant later the repellent darkness that had been pressing against his mind, lifted.

With one venomous, beaten glance, Mrs. Gunnison turned away. He could hear her footsteps trail off, the front door open. Then his arms

were around Tansy, his mouth was against hers.

CHAPTER XX

THE FRONT door closed. As if that were a signal, Tansy pushed him away while her lips were still returning his kiss.

"We daren't be happy, Norman," she said. "We daren't be happy for one single moment."

A disturbed and apprehensive look clouded the longing in her eyes, as if she were looking at a great wall that shut out the sunlight. When she answered his bewildered question, it was almost in a whisper, as if even to mention the name might be dangerous.

"Mrs. Carr—"

Her hands tightened on his arms as though to convey to him the immediacy of danger.

"Norman, I'm frightened. I'm terribly frightened. For both of us. My soul has learned so much. Things are different from what I thought. They're much worse. And Mrs. Carr—"

Norman's mind felt suddenly foggy and tired. It seemed to him almost unendurable that his feeling of relief should be broken. The desire to pretend at least for a while that things were rational and ordinary had become an almost overwhelming hunger. He stared at Tansy groggily, as if she were a figure in an opium dream.

"You're safe," he told her with a kind of harshness in his voice. "I've fought for you, I've got you back, and I'm going to hold you. They can never touch you again, not one of them."

"Oh, Norman," she began, dropping her eyes. "I know how brave and clever you've been. I know the risks you've run, the sacrifices you've

made for me—wrenching your whole life away from rationality in the bare space of a week, enduring the beastliness of that woman's naked thoughts. And you have beaten Evelyn Sawtelle and Mrs. Gunnison fairly and at their own game. But Mrs. Carr—" Her hands transmitted her trembling to him. "Oh, Norman, she only let you beat them. She wanted to give them a fright, and she preferred to let you do it for her. But now she'll take a hand herself."

"No, Tansy, no," he said with a dull insistence, but unable to summon up any argument to support his negative.

"You poor dear, you're tired," she said, becoming suddenly solicitous. "I'll fetch you a drink."

It seemed to him that he did nothing but rub his eyes and blink them, and shake his head, until she came back with the bottle.

"I want to change," she said, looking down at her torn and creased dress. "Then we must talk."

He downed a stiff drink, poured himself another. But there was no stimulation. They didn't seem to be getting rid of his opium-dream mood, instead deepened it. After a while he got up sluggishly made his way to the bedroom.

Tansy had put on a white wool dress, one which he had always liked very much, but which she had not worn for some time. He remembered she had told him that it had shrunk and become too small for her. But now he sensed that, in the joy of her return, she took a naive pride in her youthful body and wanted to show it to best advantage.

"It's like coming into a new house," she told him, with a quick little smile that momentarily cut across her apprehensive look. "Or rather like coming home after you've

been away for a long time. You're very happy, but everything is a little strange. It takes you a while to get used to it."

Now that she mentioned it, he realized that there was a kind of uncertainty about her movements, gestures and expressions, like a person convalescent after a long sickness and just now able to get up and about.

She had combed out her hair so that it fell to her shoulders, and she was still in her bare feet, giving her a diminutive and girlish appearance that he found attractive even in his stupid-headed, nightmarish state of mind.

He had brought her a drink, but she merely sipped it and put it aside.

"No, Norman," she said, "we must talk. There is a great deal I have to tell you, and there may not be much time."

He looked around the bedroom. For a while his glance rested on the creamy door of Tansy's dressing-room. Then he nodded heavily and sat down on the bed. The opium-dream feeling was stronger than ever and Tansy's oddly brisk voice and brittle manner seemed part of it.

"Back of everything is Mrs. Carr," she began. "It was she who brought Mrs. Gunnison and Evelyn Sawtelle together, and that one act speaks volumes. Women are invariably secret about their magic. They work alone. A little knowledge is passed from the elder to the younger ones, especially from mother to daughter, but even that is done grudgingly and with suspicion. This is the only case Mrs. Gunnison knew of—I learned most of this from watching her soul—in which three women actually cooperated. It is an event of revolutionary importance, betokening heaven knows what for the future.

Even now, I have only an inkling of Mrs. Carr's ambitions, but they involve vast augmentations of her present powers. For almost three quarters of a century she has been weaving her plans."

Norman torpidly absorbed these grotesque statements. He took a swallow of his second drink.

"SHE SEEMS an innocent and rather foolish old lady, strait-laced yet ineffectual, girlish but prudish," she continued. Norman started for he fancied he caught in her voice a note of secret glee. It was so jarringly incongruous that he decided it must be his imagination. When she resumed, it was gone. "But that's only part of a disguise, along with her sweet voice and jolly manners. She's the cleverest actress imaginable. Underneath she's hard as nails—cold where Mrs. Gunnison would be hot, ascetic where Mrs. Gunnison would be a slave to appetites. But she has her own deeply hidden hungers, nevertheless. She is a great admirer of Puritan Massachusetts. Sometimes I have the queerest feeling that she is planning by some unimaginable means, to re-establish that witch-ridden, so-called theocratic community in this present day and age.

"She rules the other two by fear. In a way they are little more than her apprentices. You know something of Mrs. Gunnison, so you will understand what it means when I say that I have seen Mrs. Gunnison's thoughts go weak with terror because she was afraid that she had slightly offended Mrs. Carr."

Norman finished his drink. His mind was slipping away from this new menace, instead of grasping it firmly. He must whip himself awake. he told himself unwillingly. Tansy

pushed her drink over toward him.

"And Mrs. Gunnison's fear is justified, for Mrs. Carr has powers so deadly that she has never had to use them except as a threat. Her eyes are the worst. Those thick glasses of hers—she possesses that most feared of supernatural weapons, against which half the protective charms in recorded magic are intended. That weapon whose name is so well known throughout the whole world that it has become the laughing-stock of skeptics. The evil eye. With it, she can blight and wither. With it, she can seize control of an other's soul at a single glance.

"So far she has held back, because she wanted the other two punished for certain trifling disobediences, and put into a position where they would have to beg her help. But now she will act quickly. She recognizes in you and your work a danger to herself." Tansy's voice had become so breathlessly rapid that Norman realized she must be talking against time. "Beside that, she has another motive buried in the darkness of her mind. I hardly dare mention it, but sometimes I have caught her studying my every movement and expression with the strangest avidity—"

Suddenly she broke off and her face went white.

"I can feel her now. . . . I can feel her seeking me out. . . . She is breaking through—No!" Tansy screamed. "No, you can't make me do it! . . . I won't! . . . I won't!" Before he knew it, she was on her knees, clinging to him, clutching at his hands. "Don't let her *touch* me, Norman," she was babbling like a terrified child. "Don't let her come near me."

"I won't," he said sharply, suddenly stung awake.

"Oh . . . but you can't stop her . . .

She's coming *here*, she says, in her own body, that's how much she's afraid of you! She's going to take my soul away again. I can't tell you what she wants. It's too repulsive."

He gripped her shoulders. "You must tell me," he said. "What is it?"

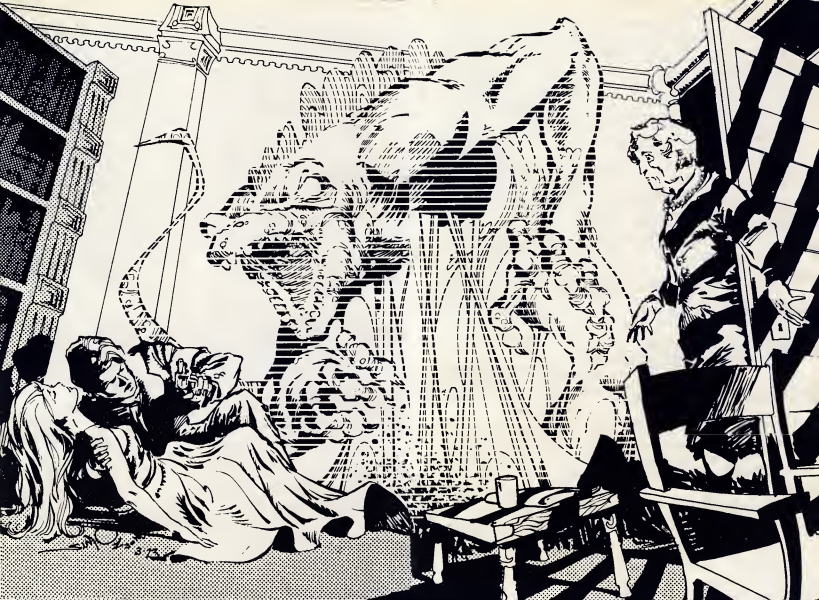
Slowly she lifted up her white, frightened face, until her eyes were looking into his. And she never once looked away as she whispered, "You know how Mrs. Carr loves youth, Norman. You know her ridiculous youthful manner. You know how she always wants to have young people around her, how she feeds on their feelings and innocence and enthusiasms. Norman, hunger for youth has been Mrs. Carr's ruling passion for decades. She's fought off age and death for a long time, longer than you think, she's nearer ninety than seventy, but they're relentlessly closing in. It isn't so much that she's afraid of death, but she'd do anything, Norman, to have a young body.

"Don't you see, Norman? The others wanted my soul, but she wants my body. Haven't you ever noticed the way she looks at you, Norman? She desires you, Norman, that foul old woman desires you, and she wants to love you in my body. She wants to possess my body and to have my soul trapped in that withered old walking-stick body of hers, leave my soul to die in her *filthy* flesh. And she's coming here *now* to do it, she's coming here *now*."

He stared in dull horror at her terrified, unwinking, almost hypnotic eyes.

"You must *stop* her, Norman, you must stop her in the only way she can be stopped." And without taking her eyes off his, Tansy rose and backed out of the room.

And perhaps there was something truly hypnotic about her eyes, some



queer effect of her own terror, for it seemed to Norman that she had no sooner left the room than she was back at his side, pressing something angular and cold into his hand.

"You must be very *quick*," she was saying. "If you hesitate for the tiniest *instant*, if you give her the slightest opportunity to fix you with her eyes, you'll be lost—and I'll be lost forever. You know the cobra that spits venom at its victim's eyes—it's like that. Get ready, Norman. She's very close."

There were hurried steps on the walk outside. He heard the front door open. Suddenly Tansy pushed her body against his so that he felt her breasts. Her moist lips felt for his own. Almost brutally he returned her kiss. She whispered into his lips, "Only be *quick*, darling." Then she slipped away.

There were steps in the hall. Norman lifted the gun. He realized that it was unnaturally dark in the bedroom—Tansy had pulled the shades. The bedroom door was pushed inward. A thin form in gray silk was silhouetted against the light from the hall. Beyond the sight of the gun he saw the faded face, the thick glasses. His finger tightened on the trigger.

The silver-haired head gave a little shake.

"Quick, Norman, *quick*!" The voice from beside him rose nervously.

The gray figure in the doorway did not move. The gun wavered, then swung suddenly around until it pointed at the figure beside him.

"Norman!"

CHAPTER XXI

SMALL RESTLESS breezes stirred the leaves of the oak standing like some burly guard beside the

narrow house of the Carrs. Through the overlapping darkness gleamed the white of the walls—such a spotless, pristine white that neighbors laughingly vowed the old lady herself came out after everyone had gone to sleep and washed them down with a long-handled mop. Everywhere was the impression of neatly tended, wholesome old age. It even had an odor—like some old chest in which a clipper captain had brought back elegant spices from his voyages in the China Trade.

The house faced the campus. The girls could see it, going to classes, and it called to their minds afternoons they had spent there, sitting in straight-backed chairs, all on their best behavior, while a wood fire burned merrily on the shining brass andirons in the white fireplace. Mrs. Carr was such a strait-laced innocent old dear. But her innocence was all to the good—it was no trouble at all to pull the wool over her eyes. And she did tell the quaintest stories with the most screamingly funny, completely unconscious points. And she did serve the nicest gingerbread with her cinnamon tea.

A light came on in the hall, casting a barred pattern through the fanlight onto the old wooden scrollwork of the porch. The six-paneled white door below the fanlight opened.

"I'm going, Flora," Professor Carr called. "Your bridge partners are a bit tardy, aren't they?"

"They'll be here soon." The silvery voice floated down the hall. "Good-by, Linthicum."

Professor Carr closed the door. Too bad he had to miss the bridge. But the paper young Rayford was going to read on the Theory of Primes would undoubtedly be interesting, and one couldn't have everything. His footsteps sounded on the pebbly

walk with its edging of tiny white flowers, like old lace. Then they reached the concrete and slowly died away.

Somewhere at the rear of the house a car drew up. There was the sound of something being lifted; then heavy, plodding footsteps. A door at the back of the house opened, and for a moment against the oblong of light a man could be seen carrying slung over his shoulder a limp and bulky bundle that might have been a muffled-up woman, except that such mysterious and suspicious goings-on were unthinkable at the Carrs, as any neighbor would have assured you. Then that door closed, too, and for a while longer there was silence, while the breezes played with the oak leaves.

With thriftless waste of rubber a black Studebaker jerked to a stop in front. Mrs. Gunnison stepped out.

"Hurry up, Evelyn," she said. "You've made us late again. You know she hates that."

"I'm coming as fast as I can," replied her companion plaintively.

As soon as the six-paneled door swung open, the faded spicy odor became more apparent.

"You're late, dears," came the silvery, laughing voice. "But I'll forgive you this once, because I've a surprise for you. Come with me."

They followed the frail figure in faintly hissing silk into the living room. Just beyond the bridge table, with its embroidered cover and two cut-glass dishes of sweets, stood Norman Saylor. In the mingled lamp light and firelight, his face was expressionless.

"Since Tansy is unable to come," said Mrs. Carr, "he's agreed to make a fourth. Isn't that a nice surprise? And isn't it very nice of Professor Saylor?"

Mrs. Gunnison seemed to be gathering her courage. "I'm not altogether sure that I like the arrangement," she said finally.

"Since when did it matter whether you liked something or not?" came the sharp answer. Mrs. Carr was standing very straight. "Sit down, all of you!"

When they had taken their places around the bridge table, Mrs. Carr ran through a deck, flipping out certain cards. When she spoke, her voice was as sweet and silvery as ever.

"Here are you two, my dears," she said placing the queens of diamonds and clubs side by side. "And here is Professor Saylor." She added the kind of hearts to the group. "And here am I." She placed the queen of spades so that it overlapped all three. "Off here to the side is the queen of hearts—Tansy Saylor. Now what I intend to do is this." She moved the queen of hearts so that it covered the queen of spades. "You don't understand? Well, it isn't what it looks like and neither of you is especially bright. You'll understand in a moment. Professor Saylor and I have just had ever so interesting a talk," she went on. "All about his work. Haven't we, Professor Saylor?" He nodded. "He's made some of the most fascinating discoveries. It seems there are laws governing the things that we women have been puttering with. Men are so clever in some ways, don't you think?"

"He's been good enough to tell all those laws to me. You'd never dream how much easier and safer it makes everything—and more efficient. Efficiency is so very important these days. Why, already Professor Saylor has made something for me—I won't tell you what it is, but there's one for each of you and one for someone else. They aren't presents, because I'll

keep them all. And if one of you should do something naughty, they'll make it ever so easy for me to whisk part of you away—you know what part.

"And now something is going to happen that will enable Professor Saylor and me to work together very closely in the future—how closely you could never imagine. You're to help. That's why you're here. Open the dining-room door, Norman."

It was an old-fashioned sliding door, gleaming white. Slowly he pushed it aside.

"There," said Mrs. Carr. "I'm full of surprises tonight."

THE BODY was lashed to the chair. From over the gag the eyes of Tansy Saylor glared at them with impotent hate.

Evelyn Sawtelle half rose, stifling a scream.

"You needn't get hysterics, Evelyn," said Mrs. Carr sharply. "It's got a soul in it now."

Evelyn Sawtelle sank back, lips trembling.

Mrs. Gunnison's face had grown pale, but she set her jaw firmly and put her elbows on the table. "I don't like it," she said. "It's too risky."

"I am able to take chances I wouldn't have taken a week ago, dear," Mrs. Carr said sweetly. "In this matter your aid and Evelyn's is essential to me. Of course, you're perfectly welcome not to help, if you don't want to. Only I do hope you understand the consequences."

Mrs. Gunnison dropped her eyes. "All right," she said. "But let's be quick about it."

"I am a very old woman," began Mrs. Carr with tantalizing slowness, "and I am very fond of life. It has been a little dispiriting for me to think that mine is drawing to a close.

And, for reasons I think you understand, I have something more to fear in death than most persons.

"But now it seems that I am once more going to experience all those things that an old woman looks upon as forever lost. The unusual circumstances of the last two weeks have helped a great deal in preparing the ground. Professor Saylor has helped too. And you, my dears, are going to help. You see, it's necessary to build a certain kind of tension, and only people with the right background can do that, and it takes at least four of them. Professor Saylor—he has such a brilliant mind!—tells me that it's very much like building up electrical tension, so that a spark will be able to jump a gap. Only in this case the gap will be from where I am sitting to there"—and she pointed at the bound figure. "And there will be two sparks. And then, when it's over, the queen of hearts will exactly cover the queen of spades. Also, the queen of spades will exactly cover the queen of hearts. You see, tonight, dears, we're positively fourth-dimensional. But it's the things you can't see that are always the most important, don't you think?"

"You can't do it!" said Mrs. Gunnison. "You won't be able to keep the truth hidden!"

"You think not? On the contrary, I won't have to make an effort. Let me ask you what would happen if old Mrs. Carr claimed that she were young Tansy Saylor. I think you know very well what would happen to that dear, sweet, innocent old lady. There are times when the laws and beliefs of a skeptical society can be so very convenient.

"You can begin with the fire, Norman. I'll tell the others exactly what they are to do."

He tossed a handful of powder on

the fire. It flared up greenly, and a pungent, cloying aroma filled the room.

And then—who knows?—there may have been a stirring at the heart of the world and movement of soundless currents in the black void. Up on the dark side of the planet, a million women moved restlessly in their sleep, and a few woke trembling with unnamed fears. Upon the light side, a million more grew nervous, and unaccustomed daydreams chased unpleasantly through their minds; some made mistakes at their work and had to add again a column of figures, or attach a different wire to a different tube, or send a misdrilled piece of metal to salvage, or re-mix the baby's formula; a few found strange suspicions growing mushroom like among their thoughts. And perhaps a certain ponderous point began to work closer and closer to the end of the massive surface supporting it, not unlike a top slowly wobbling toward the end of a table, and certain creatures who were nearby saw what was happening and skittered away terrified through the darkness. Then, at the very edge, the weird top paused. The irregularity went out of its movement, and it rode steady and true once more. And perhaps one might say that the currents ceased to trouble the void, and that the Balance had been restored . . .

Norman Saylor opened the windows at top and bottom so the breeze might fan out the remnants of pungent vapor. Then he cut the lashings of the bound figure and loosened the gag from its mouth. In a little while she rose, and with out a word they started from the room.

All this while, none of the others had spoken. The figure in the gray silk dress sat with head bowed, shoulders hunched, frail hands

dropped limply at her side.

In the doorway the woman whom Norman Saylor had loosed turned back.

"I have only one more thing to say to you. All that I told you earlier this evening was completely true, with one exception—"

Mrs. Gunnison looked up. Evelyn Sawtelle half turned in her chair. The third did not move.

"The soul of Mrs. Carr was not transferred to the body of Tansy Saylor this evening. That happened much earlier—when Mrs. Carr stole Tansy Saylor's soul from Mrs. Gunnison and then occupied Tansy Saylor's bound and empty-brained body, leaving the captive soul of Tansy Saylor trapped in her own aged body—and doomed to be murdered by her own husband in accord with Mrs. Carr's plan. For Mrs. Carr knew that Tansy Saylor would have only one panic-stricken thought—to run home to her husband. And Mrs. Carr was very sure that she could persuade Norman Saylor to kill the body housing the soul of his wife, under the impression that he was killing Mrs. Carr. And that would have been the end of Tansy Saylor's soul.

"You knew, Mrs. Gunnison, that Mrs. Carr had taken Tansy Saylor's soul from you, just as you had taken it from Evelyn Sawtelle, and for similar reasons. But you dared not reveal that fact to Norman Saylor because you would have lost your one bargaining point. This evening you half suspected that something was different from what it seemed, but you did not dare make a stand.

"And now as a result of what we have done this evening with your help, the soul of Mrs. Carr is once more in the body of Mrs. Carr, and the soul of Tansy Saylor is in the

body of Tansy Saylor. My body. Good night, Evelyn. Good night, Hulda. Good night, Flora, dear."

The six-paneled door closed behind them. The pebbly path crunched under their feet.

"How did you know?" was Tansy's first question. "When I stood there in the doorway, blinking through those awful spectacles, gasping after the way I'd hurried with only the blind thought of finding you—how did you know?"

"Partly," he said reflectively, "because she gave herself away toward the end. She began to emphasize words in that exaggerated way of hers. But that wouldn't have been enough in itself. She was too good an actress. She must have been studying your mannerisms for years. And after seeing how well you played her part tonight, with hardly any preparation, I wonder how I ever did see through her."

"Then how did you?"

"It was partly the way your hurried up the walk—it didn't sound like Mrs. Carr. And partly something about the way you held yourself. But mainly it was that head shake you gave—that quick, triple headshake. I couldn't fail to recognize it. After that, I realized all the other things."

"Do you think," said Tansy softly, "that after this you'll ever begin to wonder if I am really I?"

"I suppose I will," he said seriously. "But I'll always be able to conquer my doubts."

THERE WERE FOOTSTEPS,

then a friendly greeting from the shadows ahead.

"Hello, you two," called Mr. Gurnison. "Bridge game over? I thought I'd walk back with Linthicum and then drive home with Hulda. Say, Norman, Pollard dropped in to speak to me after the paper had been read. He's had a sudden change of heart on that matter we were talking about. On his advice the trustees have cancelled their meeting."

"It was a very interesting paper," Mr. Carr informed them, "and I had the satisfaction of asking the speaker a very tricky question. Which I am happy to say he answered excellently, after I'd cleared up a couple of minor points. But I'm sorry I missed the bridge. Oh, well, I don't suppose I'll ever notice any difference."

"And the funny thing," Tansy told Norman after they had walked on, "is that he really *won't*." And she laughed, the intoxicating, mischievous laugh of utter relief.

"Oh, my darling," she said, "do you honestly believe all this, or are you once more just pretending to believe for my sake? Do you believe that tonight you rescued your wife's soul from another woman's body? Or has your scientific mind already explained to you that you've been spending the last week pretending to believe in witchcraft to cure your wife and three other psychotic old ladies of the delusion of being each other and heaven knows what else?"

"I don't know," said Norman softly and as seriously as before. "I don't really know." □



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On August 6th, 1945, the sun came down and touched a bit of the world . . . and in the moment of that tragedy one man's world crumbled.

MONO NO AWARE

HOWARD WALDROP



THERE ARE SHADOWS in Hiroshima.

The city was levelled and rebuilt after the war. All traces of that hot morning in 1945 are gone but the Atomic Dome, the Peace Park and the shadows.

They lie there, along the bridges which span the Ohta River. Shadows or railings burnt into the bridge-road itself, indelible. Scorched there in the light of a thousands suns.

And on the steps of the Sumitomo bank. One of the nameless 70,000 statistics huddled there against the bomb burst which turned the city white with heat. His shadow is there, now part of the stone.

The city has been remade. All that remains of that day are the Peace Park, shadows on bridges and buildings. And the memories.

INOSHIRO NOWARRA rubbed his eyes. Lack of sleep left them gritty and burning. Still he worked, tightening the cockpit latch which had hung. *The most minor thing now, he thought, the most minor thing might hold me back. It cannot be. Not after this work. Not now.*

With a snap, the cockpit canopy slip closed. Nowarra squeezed graphite into the slide. He opened and closed the canopy three times. It worked smoothly, with barely a click.

He jumped off the wing, stepped to the hangar doors. He slid them back, revealing sky and stars. The August night was warm.

He jumped into the tow tractor, cranked and put it into gear. Looking back over his shoulder, he pulled the A6M Zero from its metal house.

IT WAS in the morning, and his father was going to work. As his father came out of the house, they heard an approaching plane though there was no air raid siren. He ran to his father.

His father held him while the airplane flew over. It was a Zero, flashing yellow and red in the morning sunlight. It circled and wagged its wings. They waved.

It flew away.

"There are not many planes left, are there, Father?" he asked.

"No," said the father. "Soon there will be none. Stay near the house today, Inoshiro."

"Alright, Father."

His father patted him on the shoulder and left.

He turned to go in when he saw a caterpillar on the lawn. He stooped to watch it.

He studied the caterpillar while it crawled over four or five feet of the lawn.

He looked up at the street. A man was looking at him. The man wore aviator's garb. Being six years old, Inoshiro did not know which held the greater mystery, the aviator or the caterpillar.

He finally looked back down to the caterpillar.

Then the sky turned red and the house fell down.

"Mother Mother!" he screamed, but there was no answer.

"Mother!" he screamed again.

There were more explosions as buildings burned and died.

"Inoshiro, is that you?" asked a voice in the darkness.

"Here. Here!" he cried, though he was pinned and did not know where he was.

"Keep talking, Inoshiro." said the voice. "I will find you."

"Who is it? Who is there?" he

asked.

"It is Mrs. Namura," said the voice. "I will find you."

"Where is my mother?"

"I do not see her," said the voice. "Keep talking, Inoshiro, I will find you."

The ground rumbled again. A scream came from somewhere nearby.

Inoshiro began to cry as the shock wore off. It was pitch black. He was twisted, pinned in the debris of the house. He could not breathe in the darkness.

"Mother Mother!" he cried.

He heard hands scrabbling above him and saw lightness near his arm. He tried to move but couldn't.

"Mrs. Namura!" he yelled, struggling. "Here, here!"

The hands were near. They caught him, fumbled, pulled him. Then they pulled him again and he came loose. He cried; it was almost as dark outside as under the debris. The air was full of moving, blinding dust.

"Mrs. Namura," he said, "Mrs. Namura," and hugged her and looked up at her.

She had no eyes.

HE PULLED the Zero onto the grass landing strip. The stars shone bright and light wind blew. He stopped, disconnected the tractor. The Zero hulked in the starlight, roundels barely visible on its wings.

Its clean lines were broken where blast ports of two Mauser Mk 21 30mm cannon protruded, and where a supercharger thrust from the engine cowlings. Two more cannon bulged in the wing roots. The canopy was shortened aft of the pilot, with just room for the oxygen bottles and regulator behind.

The plane was pale yellow, the engine cowlings and roundels red. It

stood high on its landing gear, nose pointed toward the ocean and Shikoku.

The Inland Sea was still.

HE HAD GROWN, like thousands of others, in the shadow of the bomb. He saw the old ones die from the slow ravages of the atom, and heard of the stillborn. He watched his playmates wither away. He grew up while the children folded the paper cranes, while the city was rebuilt by the Allies, the Children's Monument erected and the country reshaped.

Mrs. Namura died two days after the blast. His mother and sister were found weeks later when the block was cleared by the crippled and dying. His father disappeared at the hypothetical point above which the bomb burst.

Inoshiro was shunted from hospital to orphanage to school. He was one of the *hibakusha* but he did not know it; the effects of the blast did not manifest themselves until he was sixteen. Then, it was not as leukemia or bone cancer or baldness. It happened one night as he lay sleeping in the school dorm.

The sleeping forms around him melted, wavered, changed. He found himself among the old, the dying, the dead. A doctor moved from bed to bed, unable to do anything but kill pains while bodies died. He saw the hospital as he remembered it, two days after the blast.

He screamed and wakened.

A week later, it happened again.

Three nights later, a third time.

Then one afternoon, in class. The walls faded away; he saw the countryside as it had been before the school was built.

He began to read everything he could bind on the Bomb, Hiroshima, World War II, atomic fission and the

air war.

He walked through the streets of the city as though he had never seen them. He visited the shadows on the bridges, the Peace Park, the museum, the airfields, the airports, the barracks.

He became a civilian employee of the Japanese Self-Defense Force. He watched the peace riots of the late Fifties and early Sixties, and still he read.

The phrase he most often found while reading of Hiroshima was *mono no aware*. The words meant the traditional acceptance of all bad things in the past as inevitabilities, but with sadness tempered by distance in time. In use with the Bomb it had a special meaning: It is sad this terrible thing happened, but then, it was sad the whole war happened. Let us accept it, and see what the future will bring.

No, thought Inoshiro. *Mono no aware is wrong, accepting what happens as what happens. There must be a better way than to be six years old and have the sky explode and kill your family.*

That night, he walked the rubble of Hiroshima. From a hill in the nearby country, he watched it burn. He cried for his lost mother and sister and father, and the eyes of Mrs. Namura.

THE TROUBLE had been that there were too few planes and not enough fuel. And those with fuel had not been able to reach the altitude at which the B-29s operated.

The Japanese Army dug in for invasion in those last days, an invasion which never came. Secretly, just after a rainstorm one day in mythical New Mexico, the sun touched ground, fused sand, shook storefronts in Reno, Nevada.

Instead of an invasion, two bombs

would come calling for the Allies.

Nowarra had been a frightened six-year old then. He was a man, now.

BUYING the plane had taken his time and most of his money. The hardest items to obtain were the cannon parts. While he learned to fly, he also learned more about his atom-bomb affliction. On his first visits, he spoke to no one, carried no equipment. Then he began taking small things back to the flaming inferno which raged for the first few days after the bomb was dropped.

Months passed before he could carry something as small as a lunch pail. Then a shovel, then larger things. He awoke after each trip, haggard, unable to go back for days, sometimes weeks at a time. Then for longer stays. He roamed the days between the bombing and the Occupation, always careful to avoid the flames of the city.

He tried for a long time to go back past the bombing.

Inoshiro succeeded in November of 1965.

He convinced himself of something else that month. There was a building he passed each day, one of the shadow-places. He knew each mark, each scratch. That night, he took a small square of paper back to the morning of August 6, 1945. He taped the square of paper to the wall. He woke next morning feeling worse than he ever had before. He dressed hurriedly, walked to the building. On the wall was a new white square, with two little tabs where the tape had held it in place.

Inoshiro stared at the building a long time. The past, evidently, could be changed in a small way.

THE CALENDAR in the hangar read August 6, 1973. Dawn greyed the

east over the Inland Sea. The stars paled until only Venus was left. Inoshiro slipped into his flight jacket, sword at hip, headband across his hair. On the headband was the insignia of the Rising Sun. Over this, he pulled his aviator's cap and goggles. He wore no parachute.

The time was 6:45. Inoshiro climbed into the Zero, tested his oxygen regulator a last time, turned it off. He cranked the Zero, sat within the cockpit while the engine warmed. The Zero taxied to the end of the runway and lifted into the sun.

His plane appeared on the radar of the nearest airbase. A check on local airports revealed no flight clearance. Call went out for the aircraft to identify itself. The plane continued without answer on a southerly course toward Kyushu.

At 0702, the radar ran around the trace without a return.

THE WEATHER PLANE sent to check the target city would be over Hiroshima now. Inoshiro trended south. He did not want the weather plane to report hostile aircraft. As soon as the B-29 turned out to sea far ahead, Nowarra pulled into a spiral and levelled out at 5000 feet. An hour out in the Pacific, between his Zero and Tinian, a flight of three B-29s came toward him.

The first was named No. 91. Like the others, its rudder was painted with the circle and arrow of the 509th Composite Group. Behind flew the *Great Artiste* and the *Enola Gay*.

All, Nowarra knew, had been stripped for the mission, with only tail guns functioning. The planes contained instruments, not weapons. The No. 91 held cameras, the *Great Artiste* telemetering devices to test blast effects. The *Enola Gay* carried the "Little Boy" deep within its

bowels.

The official mission reports read: No flak, no fighters. They were not expecting interception. Few Japanese planes could perform at 31,000 feet; flak could not reach that high.

Nowarra banked the A6M for a last look at the city. Hiroshima lay below him like an outspread fan, the River Ohta branching to the sea. Just short of the main river bridge would be the hypocenter of the blast.

Inoshiro's head swam; he fought to hold himself still in time. He had to concentrate to keep himself back this long before the blast. *I have made it back with my plane*, he thought. *I have come this far. Do not let me fail now.*

The time was 7:43. It would take nine minutes to rise to the altitude of the bombers. The sun stood east. The B-29s would come at him out of the sun.

Inoshiro continued his look at last things. He looped the Zero over the city. He turned towards his home. Down there, near the third and fourth branch of the Ohta was his house and that of the eyeless Mrs. Namura.

He remembered that morning. The Zero swept low over the rooftops. There—his street, his home, a child playing in the yard. Inside, his mother and sister. His father had not left for work yet. He would be eating the last of his breakfast, as would so many fathers on that day. The wives would be scooping coals into corners of cooking pots. These pots would be responsible for much of the devastation beyond the blast area. When the shock wave came, they would fly with the other debris, setting fire to paper, wood, clothing.

Inoshiro circles. He saw the child run to his father. He banked, came back, wagged wings and began his long climb up the air.

The sky was three-tenths cloud. He rose, the engine straining. He pulled away from the city and cleared his cannon.

Doom Doom Doom Doom the four 30mm cannon said to the bright morning.

Can there be no change to what has happened, only regret? wondered Inoshiro. *Perhaps not this time, not this day.* He turned toward the Inland Sea.

7:59. The three silver bombers would be in their run over Shikoku. In seven minutes, they would pass over a convoy in Fukayama Bay.

Nowarra put his mask on at 14,000 feet. Tension made his shoulders hunch, his head began to hurt. For an instant, vision wavered. *No!* he told himself. *I have been here this long. I cannot falter now.*

Still he nosed the A6M up the eastern sky, toward the sun. He reached 23,000 feet and settled into a shallower climb angle. Hiroshima lay behind like a dream; a few minutes ahead were the B-29s.

His head hurt more. The sky shimmered.

The landscape altered slightly. The altimeter showed 28,000 feet. 8:09. The bombers should be only three or four minutes away, only a few thousand feet above his altitude.

The sky was darker blue. He cut the supercharger in. The plane lurched ahead. *Where are they?*

A reflection of sunlight ahead. Two of them. The *Enola Gay* followed by the *Great Artiste*. No. 91 had turned aside to film the drop twelve miles away.

Nowarra levelled the Zero for his run.

Time shimmered.

They were gone! His watch said 8:13. Two minutes. *There they were, past him.* He had moved ahead in

time.

The Zero came around at full speed. The *Enola Gay* and the *Great Artiste* were on their final runs. He edged the Zero's nose over to gain speed.

The wings screamed in thin air. The supercharger whined like a bee in a tin hive.

8:14. Near Hiroshima now. 31,000 feet. Seconds left, only seconds. Already the arming tone of the bomb was being heard in No. 91, far away. The tone would stop as the bomb left *Enola Gay*.

Close, but not close enough to fire. *They have not seen me. They worry about the bomb. Too late. Too late.*

8:15. Hiroshima lay below, a real city in a real time.

Nowarra began to fire while too far away from the *Enola Gay*. Already the men inside would have their goggles on.

The Zero closed, still firing.

Tracers crawled up toward the bombers.

8:15.17. *The Enola Gay lifts,*

breaks to the right. The Great Artiste banks left. Three parachutes blossom on the air.

A cheer runs through an anti-aircraft battery on the ground. One of the two planes veering away must be in trouble; the crew must be bailing out.

The three parachutes carry telemeters to send blast data back to the *Great Artiste*.

The sky ahead was empty, a silver bomber to left and right. Inoshiro's tracers laced between. His finger left the button. He turned away from the doomed city.

Inoshiro looked up at the street. A man stood in aviator's gear. He was watching Inoshiro.

Inoshiro looked down at the caterpillar crawling across the yard.

The man in the street watched the two planes turn away high overhead. The parachutes began to blossom.

He counted to forty-three.

Purple instant of death.

Mono no aware. □

AUTHORS' PAGE

Continued from page 121

Books, and that *CONJURE WIFE* will be reissued by Award Books in early June.

RON GOULART, "Kilbride" creator, has been writing humorous fiction for the past thirteen years. His stories have appeared in *Fantasy and SF*, *Amazing and Fantastic*, *Universa*, *Galaxy* and *If*, *Alfred Hitchcock's Magazine*, *Ellery Queen's*, and *Playboy*. His books currently include *SHAGGY PLANET*, Lancer Books, *A TALENT FOR THE INVISIBLE*, Daw Books, *A LOVELY WAY TO DIE*, Ace Books,

WILDSMITH, Doubleday, *BROKE DOWN ENGINE*, Collier Books, and *GADGET MAN*, Paperback Library. Ron is in his forties, lives in Connecticut, resembles a highly intelligent rabbit. Ron (like so many others) left a rewarding advertising career to make his fortune writing fiction; Madison Avenue's loss is our gain.

ANNE McCAFFREY, whose "Finders Keepers" decorates this issue, has been writing fiction ever since her children grew up; her stories have appeared in all of the major science fiction magazines, such as *Galaxy* and *If*, *Analog*, and *F & SF*. Her most recent novel is *DRAGON-QUEST*, out through Ballantine. □

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